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OR,

Saving the Senator's Daughter.

The Romance of the "Ugly Gang."

BY GEORGE C. JENKS,
AUTHOR OF "GIT THAR OWNEY," "THE PITCHER
DETECTIVE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE MOUNTAIN DEMON.

"HANDS UP!"

"I—"

"HANDS UP!"

"But—"

"HANDS UP, I TELL YOU!"

The command was fierce, in a voice that grated harshly even above the noise of the rushing train, and the expostulatory answers, high-pitched, in terror, from the surprised Express

"WELL?" DEMANDED THE ENGINEER, "WHO AM I?" "IRON HAND, THE CHARMED DETECTIVE!" WAS THE CRINGING RUFFIAN'S REPLY.

messenger, were equally audible, although in a different way.

It was the Express car of a through Pennsylvania Railroad train, en route from Chicago to New York, and now, at one o'clock in the morning, it was on the very summit of the Alleghany Mountains, with a high bank on one side, and a vast slope on the other, stretching away in the darkness, like a chasm that might have terminated in the inferior regions, for anything that could be distinguished.

Fir-trees, that seemed to be dead-black, covered the bank on one side, and the slope on the other so thickly, that the underbrush would have been invisible, even in the daylight. It is one of the wildest and most beautiful scenes on the Pennsylvania road, as any traveler will testify, but at night there is a grandeur in it that borders so closely upon the terrible as to make one almost lose sight of its beauty.

There are very few habitations in the neighborhood. A farm-house on one of the hills rolling away in the darkness. A woodman's hut nestling in the shadows of a valley. A signal-box, a few miles further on, at Horseshoe Curve. These are all the signs of human life anywhere in the vicinity, and they are too far away to be worth considering at this moment, with three desperate masked men holding heavy six-shooters leveled at the heads of the Express messenger and his assistant in the dimly-lighted car, as the powerful locomotive snorts over the mountains and keeps the train at full speed. It is a veritable fiery-red demon.

"Ef yer move one uv them thar fingers uv yourn, I'll shoot it off, see?" growled the foremost robber as he leaned against the side of the car and playfully fingered the trigger of his revolver.

The Express messenger did not answer. He was thinking. But, he took care not to move even a finger as he held his hands above his head in obedience to orders.

"Good!" growled the robber. "Wilkie, fix him, will yer?"

This last direction was given to one of his companions, who stood behind him pistol in hand, ready to shoot if necessary.

"All right, Jim!"

The words were spoken in a soft, gentle voice that made the Express messenger start involuntarily.

The next moment a thin, but strong cord, in which might have been detected a strand of wire entwined in the hemp if any one had examined it, was thrown around the messenger's wrists, which were jerked down to his sides and deftly tied so that he was as helpless as a trussed chicken. Then his pistol was removed from his pocket, and the leading robber gave him a kick in a spirit of playfulness apparently that was certainly not appreciated by the recipient.

"Now, hustle, Wilkie! We ain't got no time ter spare. We'll be gittin' ter Gallitzin soon. An' then thar'll be trouble."

"All right, Jim."

Again that sweet, low voice, that caused the Express messenger to turn his head involuntarily to look at the slim boyish figure of the robber, who had tied him, and who was unable to conceal by his black mask the fact that his face was as clean and pale as a girl's.

The third robber had not been idle. From the moment when the three had made their appearance from behind the pile of trunks at the end of the car, where they had been hidden since the train pulled out of Pittsburgh, he had been busy over the messenger's assistant—a mere boy, who was frightened nearly out of his wits, and had given himself up for dead at the first alarm.

He was now lying in a corner, tied hand and foot, with a piece of wood in his mouth to prevent his making a noise, and as helpless as his chief.

"Swikey, git inter that safe ez soon ez yer kin, d'yer hear?" commanded Jim, as he produced a peculiar steel instrument from his inside pocket, resembling a poker, with a sharpened end, bent into a curve that gave it a tremendous leverage.

Swikey took three or four lengths of steel from his pockets, and jointed them. Then he produced some odd-looking paraphernalia, of which the most prominent object was a sprawling steel bunch of claws. He placed these claws against the door of the iron safe that was braced to the floor against one side of the car.

The young fellow with the gentle voice, who had been addressed as Wilkie, assisted in placing the machine, while Jim walked up and down, with his revolver in hand, ready to shoot either the messenger or his assistant, or both should it become necessary.

The peculiar instrument, with the sprawling

claws, is known to burglars and the police, as the "old man." It is so strong, owing to the leverage it controls, that it can pull out the front of any ordinary safe without much exertion upon the part of the operator, while being at the same time so light and compact, that it can be carried in a pocket without revealing its presence to any one not in the secret.

A small steel drill is part of the instrument. This drill was soon set at work by Swikey, and a hole bored in the center of the safe door. Then a few more deft movements and the machine was ready for the supreme tug.

All these operations had been carried on with hardly any noise, but even if they had made a loud racket it could not have been heard amid the rushing of the train.

A quick turn of an iron handle, and the door of the safe began to groan and strain.

"Is she comin', Swikey?" asked the principal robber, Jim.

"Yes, in a minute."

"Wal, hurry."

"All right."

"Don't be impatient Jim," put in Wilkie, in that soft, gentle voice of his.

The older robber turned quickly and his hand was raised as if to strike the boy.

"Hold on!" shouted the Express messenger, startled out of a sense of his own danger by the brutality of the robber.

"What's the matter with you?" growled Jim.

He bestowed a hearty kick upon the recumbent form of the Express messenger, and then, with a warning scowl, that could be seen through his black mask, turned toward the safe and seized the iron bar that seemed to control the working of the "old man."

Jim and Swikey tugged at the bar, while Wilkie stood by the side of the Express messenger, looking at him with an expression that might have meant pity, and that, covered as his face was by the mask, may only have been curiosity.

"Now, Swikey!" growled Jim.

"Let 'er go."

"Altogether!"

There was a strong effort on the part of the two men, and with a crash, the ponderous door of the safe fell outward, and the interior was exposed.

Swikey turned over the door that he might extricate the "old man" from the general wreckage, while Jim, producing more small steel instruments from his pockets, pried open the inner doors of the safe.

"Hyar it is!" chuckled Jim.

"Got it, Jim?" asked Wilkie.

"Yes."

"Good!" ejaculated Swikey, who, having hastily put the component parts of the "old man" away in his pockets, was now looking over the shoulder of Jim.

The robber was holding up a black leather case, that he had just pried open with one of his small, steel implements, and in which could be seen a mass of flashing light.

Diamonds!

A necklace made up of dozens of large stones—every one a gem of almost inestimable value.

"She's er darlin', ain't she!" observed Jim, surprised out of his usual surliness for the moment by his delight.

"Oh, Jim, ain't it lovely?" cried Wilkie.

The robber did not say anything more. He hid the black leather case away in an inner pocket, and then with the help of Swikey, examined the other compartments of the safe, and took out packages of greenbacks that were carefully tied up and labeled with their amounts.

"Swikey, you kin carry most of this stuff. I don't want to be bothered with it."

"All right, Jim."

"And—Wilkie, you take some, too."

"Yes, Jim," submissively.

"I'll take one little bundle, case I happen ter want some afore I git ter New York," went on Jim.

"All right."

Jim took one package marked \$1,000 and pocketed it. Then, in a business-like way, he took package after package and handed them to Swikey and Wilkie, who stowed them away in a handy manner which suggested that they were accustomed to carrying parcels in such a way they would not be too conspicuous to the casual observer.

"What shall we do with these fellers, Jim?" asked Swikey, as he looked down at the Express messenger and his assistant.

"Leave 'em alone. What should we do with 'em?"

"All right, Jim. I don't want ter take 'em anywhar, I'm sure."

Jim did not answer. He put his hand to the bell-rope over his head and gave it a sharp tug.

Swikey burst into a loud laugh.

"What's ther matter?" demanded Jim, indignantly.

Swikey only laughed the louder.

"What's ther durned idiot mean, an' why don't the train slow up?"

The robber looked fiercely around him, and made a movement as if he would strike Wilkie.

The boy raised his hand deprecatingly, as he said, in his gentle tones:

"You cut the rope yourself and knotted it at the end of the car right after we left Pittsburgh."

Jim started. He had forgotten all about this precaution taken to prevent the Express messenger communicating with any of the train hands in case he was not overcome at once by the robbers.

For a moment he stood nonplused. Then he stooped and examined the ropes that bound his two prisoners.

"They are all right. Now follow me."

A small door at the forward end of the car that was intended to be used only for emergencies and that was secured by two ponderous bolts inside was thrown open, and Jim stood in the opening looking out into the blackness.

"No time to lose. We'll be at Altoona afore we know whar we air."

The train was not far from the Horseshoe Curve and the darkness was deeper than ever.

Jim ran up the iron ladder on the baggage car ahead of him, and crawled over toward the engine. Swikey was close behind him.

The engine, in front of the baggage car, looked like an infernal machine, as the red glow of the furnace lighted up the fir trees on either side of the track fitfully when the fireman opened the door to shovel in more coal.

The grade at that point of the Pennsylvania road is steep, and the engine was laboring and breathing hard like a sentient thing as it struggled along.

"Keep close ter me, Swikey."

"All right."

"Whar's Wilkie?"

"Back in ther car, watchin' ther two cases."

Jim nodded his head in satisfaction, and crawled on.

"We'll bev ter lay out ther enginess an' fireman, I guess, Swikey."

"Guess so."

"Ther only way we kin stop this cussed train; so get ready, now."

"I'm ready."

The short dialogue, carried on in growling whispers, had not interfered with the progress of the two desperadoes.

They were crawling over the coal in the tender, and were almost near enough to the cab to jump on the shoulders of the engineer, standing with his hand upon the lever and his eyes straining at the window before him into the blackness beyond.

A tall, powerful man was the engineer. Closely-curling black hair showed beneath the soft felt hat that was pulled well forward, but not enough to conceal the flashing of the piercing dark eyes, that glowed in the light of the lantern, and fairly blazed when the furnace door was opened. He wore the usual check blouse and blue overalls of an engineer, and his easy, supple movements, with the natural way in which he grasped the lever controlling the movements of the locomotive, showed that he was accustomed to his work.

One distinguishing characteristic that no one could help noticing was that he wore upon his right hand a kid glove, with a gauntlet that reached up his sleeve out of sight.

"Now, Swikey!"

"Wal?"

"You take the fireman and I'll clean out the engineer."

"All right."

The two ruffians nerved themselves for action, and then, with a simultaneous whoop of defiance, sprang into the cab!

Swikey seized the fireman by the throat, and, with a mighty effort forced him back upon the seat at the side of the cab, at the same time dealing him a blow on the forehead with a handy billy that rendered him senseless.

Jim was not so fortunate, however.

Just as he jumped forward and tried to secure the engineer as his companion had the fireman, the man at the lever turned and caught him by both wrists.

"Curse you!" hissed the robber.

"What do you want?" asked the engineer, as coolly as if he had been a dry-goods clerk waiting upon a lady.

The robber writhed and struggled. By a

mighty effort he managed to get his right hand free, and pulled back the lever, slackening the speed of the engine.

Ere he could follow this up by a blow, as he intended, his eyes fell upon the right hand of the engineer that was so tightly clasped around his wrist.

The effect was extraordinary!

With a perfect howl of dismay, Jim crouched at the feet of the engineer, as if all strength had gone out of his being.

The engineer stooped over him and whispered in his ear, while a strange light played in his dark eyes:

"Jim Sturgis!"

Jim shuddered.

"You thought you would never see me again, eh? Didn't you?" went on the engineer, pitilessly.

"Yes, yes!" whimpered the cowed villain.

The train was slowing up, but no one in the cab seemed to notice it. Swikey was utterly dazed at the turn things were taking.

"Jim Sturgis, I want you," said the engineer, sternly. "Do you remember the name the boys gave me in California?"

"Ye-es."

"And do you think I can make the name good now or not?"

"Yes, I know you can. Curse you!"

"Jim," broke in Swikey. "Who is this man?"

The black mask fell off Jim Sturgis's face, showing a low-browed, black-mustached countenance. Every lineament expressed terror, vindictiveness and awful astonishment, as he looked up into the stern face of the engineer, who was still holding him in that relentless grasp.

Then a voice that seemed to come from the depths of Jim Sturgis's chest, rather than from the blue lips trembling under the black mustache:

"His name is—a—a—we used—to—call—call—him—"

"Well," demanded the engineer, "who am I?"

"Iron Hand, the Charmed Detective!" was the cringing ruffian's reply.

The words were hardly out of his mouth when there was a jar as if the mountain had risen up and flung itself against the front of the engine, and the next moment a pile of broken cars occupied the place of the train, while the engine, torn loose, rolled over and over down the slope into the awful chasm, hundreds of feet below.

The demon of death was at work!

CHAPTER II.

TWO NARROW ESCAPES.

It is two days after the wreck on the top of the Alleghany Mountains, and the scene has shifted to New York City.

It is one of the lodging-houses in the nest of small streets near the foot of the Bowery. The Elevated Railroad, whisking sharply around a corner, seems as if it would allow its engines to plunge into the windows of the house, so close do the iron girders come to the building.

There are rows of bunks along each side of the long, stuffy room, feebly lighted by a single gas-jet at the end, and most of the bunks have occupants, as is evidenced by the array of feet, in all sorts of queer attitudes, that are visible at the ends.

Suddenly the chorus of snores and snorts that has been steadily in progress is disturbed by the low hum of voices, that becomes louder as the participants grow more interested in their conversation.

"You are sure yer saw him, Swikey?"

The voice is one that can be recognized at once as that of Jim Sturgis, the man who had taken part in the robbery on the Pennsylvania Railroad, on the night of the wreck.

"Yer bet yer. D'yer think ez I 'u'd ever forgit sich er man ez that? Why, he looks through er feller every time," answered Swikey.

The two men occupied adjoining bunks.

Jim Sturgis's forehead was bound with a linen bandage, not too clean, and as he leaned over the side of his bed he presented anything but a prepossessing appearance.

As for Swikey, a gash across his right cheek, and a black eye, gave token that he too had been in trouble.

"Cuss him!" growled Jim. "Ef thet lump uv rock hedn't er tumbled down an' thrown the train off ther track, I s'pose he'd 'a' had us both behind the bars afore now."

"He may git us thar yet."

"He may, but," added the other, significantly, "ef he does he'll hev sich er time ez'll make him wonder why he wuz fool enough ter tackle ther job. That's all."

"Um!" commented Swikey.

Jim Sturgis flashed a look of contempt at his companion, and turned around in his bunk with a bounce as if he were going to sleep.

Then he bounced back again and thrust his hand under the pillow, while a grim smile lighted up his face.

"All right?" asked Swikey, in a low voice.

"Yes."

"Show 'em."

"What, hyar? With all these crooks and vags looking on? You're gittin' crazier, Swikey."

"They won't see. Jist one little peep."

It may have been Swikey's pleading tone, but more likely it was Jim Sturgis's own desire to gaze upon his treasure, that induced him to draw from beneath his pillow the black leather case that he had stolen from the Express car just two weeks before.

The blue-white diamonds flashed even in the gloom of the semi-dark room, and Swikey, who was leaning over into the bunk of his companion, uttered a low cry of delight.

Suddenly a hand, incased in a black kid glove, seized the black leather case and closed it with a snap.

Then, ere another word could be said, the case was transferred to the pocket of the owner of the hand, as the tall form of the engineer of the Express train stood between the two bunks in the easy attitude of one who was thoroughly master of the situation.

"Good-evening, James," remarked Iron Hand, cheerfully. "I thought we should meet again soon. I have missed you since the night of the shaking up on the mountain at Horseshoe Bend, the other day."

The desperado was too surprised and terrified to reply.

But only for a moment. With a sudden spring he had the engineer by the throat with one hand, while he seized the black leather case that protruded from the breast pocket of his enemy, with the other.

Iron Hand, taken off his guard, stumbled against the trunk behind him and fell with crushing force upon Swikey, who emitted a squeak of pain as he struggled to release himself.

But Iron Hand did not waste any time upon such an insignificant fellow as Swikey. He saw that Sturgis had already reached the window, and was climbing out upon the iron fire-escape.

In another minute he would be gone.

"They call me the Charmed Detective," muttered Iron Hand between his teeth, as he dashed after the thief. "I'll charm him when I catch him."

He was in a house where there was every sympathy for a law-breaker, and none for his pursuer.

As he ran along the narrow alley made by the two rows of bunks, a burly fellow sprung out of bed and lay down on the floor for the detective to trip over him.

But he did not trip.

He stooped suddenly, seized the fellow's neck with his gloved hand and threw him upon a bed with as little trouble as if he had weighed twenty pounds instead of two-hundred.

The man lay on the bed unconscious. Iron Hand's grip was one that stopped all breathing when anything like its full force was exerted.

The robber was on the fire-escape now, some fifty feet above the cobblestones of the street. Ten feet below him were the tracks of the L road.

"Now, Jim Sturgis, I have you," cried the detective as he too reached the fire-escape which consisted of an iron balcony extending around the house.

Iron Hand was between Jim Sturgis and the stairway, and he knew he had the desperado at his mercy.

A pistol-barrel flashed in the moonlight, as Sturgis faced the detective, but both knew that the desperado had failed to procure any cartridges, and that it was, therefore, useless as a firearm.

Iron Hand's contemptuous laugh goaded the other to fury. With an oath he threw the pistol with all his force at the detective's head.

Iron Hand dodged, and the weapon crashed through the cab window of an engine drawing its train along the L road, that happened to be passing. The next instant the two men were clasped in deadly embrace.

The struggle lasted only a few seconds.

The gloved hand took the two wrists of Jim Sturgis in one grip and the robber was helpless. He could feel—or thought he could feel—the bones of his wrist crunching out of place in that awful clasp, while the detective was feeling in a tail-pocket for his handcuffs.

Deftly the steel bracelets were slipped upon the wrists of the robber, and the detective smiled peacefully as he saw that he had secured his prisoner.

Then, and not till then, was the mighty grasp of the gloved hand loosened.

Sturgis breathed a sigh of relief, as he slowly moved his fingers and hands generally as far as he could in the handcuffs, and tried to assure himself that every bone was not broken.

"Durn yer. Yer hand is ez strong ez it ever wuz. I'd like to see it without er glove on. Shoot me fer er coyote ef I don't believe ez it's er piece uv machinery, instead of flesh an' blood," growled the robber.

The detective smiled.

"Come on, Jim. I'll take you back to where you belong now. I've had a long hunt for you. But I've got you at last," he remarked coolly.

"Hev yer? Not yet!"

The desperado's voice rose almost to a shriek.

As he spoke he threw himself over the iron railing of the fire-escape balcony, and hung there by his manacled hands. He was almost helpless, but there was a scowl of defiance in his flashing eyes that told the detective that death would come before a surrender.

Iron Hand rushed forward to save his prisoner from the terrible fate that seemed inevitable. To drop to the street meant a sheer fall of fifty feet, with, most likely, every bone broken. Being handcuffed, it would be impossible for the robber to make any attempt to lessen the effects of the fall.

At this moment another L train was rushing along bound for up-town.

The train was not more than a hundred feet away, the detective was reaching down to seize Jim Sturgis by his coat-collar and a dozen white-faced men at the window from which they had come were watching every movement with breathless interest, when the desperado, with a mighty effort, kicked against an iron post that supported the balcony, and sent himself swinging outward.

Once, twice, he swung, kicking at the post each time, to send him further outward. Then he let go his hold and fell—upon the track of the railroad, immediately in front of the tearing, roaring, monster of an engine, now almost upon him.

The whistle shrieked and the people in the window of the lodging-house strained their eyes to see the desperado ground to pieces beneath the wheels.

There was a shudder of horror through the frames of the people in the window, while the passengers on the train sat unconsciously inside the cars, reading newspapers or nodding in short dozes, as is their custom on late trains. They had not seen anything of the danger of Jim Sturgis, and if they were riding over him, were happily unconscious of the fact.

Hardly had the watchers from the window time to note the fall of the robber, when another body shot headlong from the balcony, toward the railroad.

It struck the edge of the iron side of the Elevated track, and then bounded downward to the street.

It was Iron Hand!

"He's gone!" cried Swikey.

"Serves him right," added the burly fellow whom the detective had upset on his way along the room after Jim Sturgis.

The consensus of opinion among the lodgers seemed to be that the smashing of a detective was a good thing, on general principles, and there was not a man in that great, stuffy room that had not recognized Iron Hand as a detective by this time.

Simultaneously with the falling of Iron Hand, Jim Sturgis dropped through the track of the railroad, with one handcuff off, dangling from the wrist that was still embraced by the other.

His hands had been so near the wheels, ere he dropped to safety between the rails, that the end of one of the handcuffs had actually been cut off, leaving one hand free.

As he fell he reached out involuntarily for something by which he could arrest his descent. His hands caught an iron girder running diagonally from the ground to the track, and he ran down with the speed and agility of a monkey. But before he did so he picked up a black leather case that had fallen from the detective's pocket as he swung over the roadway.

"So you think! You are no match for Jim Sturgis this hyer time, and what hez become ov yer charmed life?"

A mute answer to his mocking query was given in the sudden appearance of Iron Hand from a pile of hay that had accidentally been overturned on the street an hour or so before.

The detective did not see Sturgis, for that worthy slipped around a corner and was lost in the tortuous maze of streets, while his pursuer was picking up his hat from the hay-pile, and saying to himself, as he smiled and shook his head:

"I begin to believe I have a charmed life, as the boys used to say out in 'Frisco."

Then he looked about to find the shattered remains of the robber.

CHAPTER III. A PLOT REVEALED.

JIM STURGIS did not waste any time in getting away from the corner where he had been so rudely disturbed in his bunk in the lodging-house by Iron Hand.

He made his way along the streets that ran in all sorts of eccentric directions in this part of New York, and soon found himself crossing City Hall Park and Broadway. He walked hastily down Courtlandt street, past the great commission warehouses, with their peculiar mixture of odors, in which fruit and cheese predominate.

Suddenly he stopped in the shadow of a great wooden awning, and disappeared.

He seemed to evaporate. No one could have said that he had entered a doorway or window, gone up in a balloon, or fallen down a hole. But he had disappeared from the street as surely as if he had adopted any of these methods of flight.

Not a soul was to be seen on the street, so that his evaporation did not provoke comment.

Had there been a policeman or any other curious mortal in the neighborhood, he might have investigated the movements of Jim Sturgis, but it would not have enlightened him unless he had held some clew beforehand.

And yet his disappearance was accomplished in a perfectly natural manner.

A cellar flap that formed the top of a rusty elevator for moving goods to and from the cellar was raised about eighteen inches, so that a man not too stout could squeeze himself through with a little exertion. Where he went when he had squeezed himself through was a matter of conjecture to the stranger.

Jim Sturgis evidently knew the locality and the ins and outs of this particular cellar, for he thrust himself through the opening head-first, and reached for one of the iron rods supporting the top of the elevator in the manner of a man who was sure of finding what he sought.

An easy movement let him down to the floor of a dark pit, covered with a layer of dust that might have been accumulating for a century.

Still with a broken handcuff dangling at his right wrist, Sturgis felt for an iron handle attached to the elevator, and turning it with some difficulty and much creaking, brought the top of the machine level with the sidewalk, thus completely closing the cellar.

Then he felt for a door in the stone wall that separated the outer area from the cellar behind.

He gave three raps—first one, then after a pause, two in quick succession.

A single ray of light suddenly flashed out of the darkness full upon his face, and then disappeared.

The next moment the heavy door slid aside revealing an opening through which he could pass.

The door was quickly closed again, and in the dim light that came from another apartment separated by a door that was slightly ajar, Sturgis could just make out an old woman, holding a bull's-eye lantern that she had flashed at him through a little wicket in the door, and that had enabled her to see who the applicant for admission was.

"Wal, Kit!" snarled Sturgis.

"Well, dearie," responded the old woman.

"Who's inside?"

"Eh?"

Sturgis clinched his fist as if he would have liked to deal the old lady a thump on her head, but he didn't. He only repeated in a louder tone:

"Who's inside?"

The hag did not reply, in words, but taking him by the hand, led him to the half-open door and dragging him into the next room, let him see for himself.

As he made his appearance a voice that had presumably ceased only since it was known that there was some one seeking admittance broke out with nerve-racking violence.

A squeaky fiddle in the hands of a lusty young colored man, rendered a rattling plantation air, and three dissipated-looking fellows beat their heels upon the floor in accompaniment. A man,

dressed in the height of fashion, with a light overcoat only partly concealing the full shirt-front and low-cut vest of evening dress, sat at a rude table near the kitchen stove and ate some fried sausages and potatoes with a keen relish that one would hardly have expected to see in one so stylish amid such plebeian surroundings.

An old man, with a short clay pipe in one corner of his mouth was sitting with his feet on the front of the stove, apparently deriving the greatest possible enjoyment from some very strong tobacco.

Sturgis stalked into the room, and sitting down at the table opposite the gentleman engaged upon the sausages and potatoes, held up his hand with the handcuffs attached.

Without a word, the stylishly-dressed man drew a penknife from his pocket, and releasing a thin wire by touching a spring in the implement, thrust it into the keyhole of the iron bracelet and took it off the desperado's hand in an instant.

"Thanks, Gabe."

"Welcome," was the laconic reply, as the gentleman resumed his attack upon his supper, or whatever he called his meal, for it was now two o'clock in the morning.

"Say, Gabe."

"Well?"

"It's gittin' durned hot!"

"So I suppose."

"Why?"

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"Wal, now, Gabe, I wish ez you would get through with thet thar grub uv yours, an' talk business," growled Sturgis impatiently.

"You talk it."

"What?"

"Business," returned Gabe, coolly, as he drank a glass of water, and then daintily whisked a crumb from his knee with a silk handkerchief that he had worn tucked inside his vest.

Sturgis turned up his nose in impatient disgust at this affectation of dudishness, as he thought it, and went on, in a steady, low voice, like a man unburdening himself of a speech that he had to dispose of.

"I've come hyar from California ter do two things, an' I've done one uv 'em. I wanted a certain diamond necklace, ez belonged to Senator Kraft, of 'Frisco, an' that he wuz sendin' ter New York to be fixed over inter er coronet fer his new bride."

"Well?" put in the other, lighting a cigarette and gently blowing a thin column of blue smoke from his mouth and nostrils.

"Wal, I hev thet necklace."

"Yes, I know."

"You do? Who told yer?"

"Doesn't matter. Go on."

"Gabriel Collins, if I didn't know ez you are Gabe the Swell, one of the best cracksmen in the whole country, I should think ez you wuz thet devil," said Jim Sturgis with a sort of admiring fear.

"Thanks. Go on with your yarn."

"You are right, Gabe, I hev got thet necklace, an' I mean ter keep it."

"Go on."

"The other reason I hed for comin' hyar wuz to git sart'in papers ez will prove thet ther gal ez come inter my hands when she wuz er bud, an' thet I hev brought up to believe ez I'm her older brother, is thet daughter of Senator Kraft by his first wife."

"Well, have you arranged the second matter yet?" asked Gabe, the Swell, flicking off the ashes of his cigarette and waving it gently to and fro under his nose, so that he could inhale its fragrance without being compelled to draw it in the usual manner.

"No."

"Ah, you surprise me."

Mr. Collins may have been surprised, but if he was, he did not show it in his demeanor. His attitude and air were the personification of a thoroughly self-possessed man, who had never experienced the emotion of astonishment in his life.

"You heard about the smash-up on the Pennsylvania road two weeks ago, in which a dozen passengers wuz badly hurt, an' the fireman an' conductor an' one or two train hands killed."

"Yes," drawled the other. "And I heard the other part of the story—how you an' Swikey and a boy that we call Wilkie were going through the Express car at the time."

"What has he—has she—" almost shrieked Jim Sturgis, as he sprung from his chair and dashed at a door behind him opposite that by which he had entered.

For the first time Gabe the Swell evinced something approaching excitement as he, too, arose

from his chair and, seizing the desperado by the arm with an iron grip that one would hardly have expected in his slim, white fingers, forced him back into his chair.

"Fool!" he hissed, between his teeth that were so tightly set that they had bitten the cigarette in two, allowing the lighted end to fall upon the floor, while he nervously turned the other, with its paper and tobacco, over with his tongue.

He looked hastily around, but he saw that the three fellows listening to the ducky's music and the old man hanging over the stove, had evidently not noticed either the words or movements of Sturgis. As for the old woman she had disappeared through the doorway toward which Sturgis had moved, as soon as he had come in.

"All right, Gabe. They never heard anything. But if that girl hev given me away, I'll—"

"She has not said a word. You're on the wrong tack. But you must think I do not attend to my business if you suppose I do not know what you have been doing."

"Wal, all right. But I don't feel very safe hyar. Thet's the reason Swikey an' me hev stayed somewhar else till now. But I've got ter git this hyar business settled up right away, so ez I kin git back ter 'Frisco. I don't like New York, since—since—I got inter thet scrape five years ago."

"You mean—"

"Never mind what I mean," interrupted Sturgis. "Air you goin' ter help me git through hyar, or not?"

"Tell me what you want me to do."

"Jist this. To git them thar papers for me."

"You know where they are?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Will you get them for me?"

"Where are they?"

"I'll tell you in good time if you will do thet job for me. It is right in your line."

"Oho!"

"Yes. An old man, who lives alone, has them, and he is holding them for cash. He won't take any chances, curse him, or I'd ba' hed 'em long ago. He is old and silly, but he knows ez these papers air vallable, an' he wants cash down—\$100,000—afere he'll let go his hold."

"Um!"

"Wal, he must be persuaded," went on the desperado, with a significant grin.

"When do you want this visit made?" asked Gabe, the Swell, as he stretched out his foot and admired the patent-leather shoe upon it.

The old man, who had been sitting over the stove, took his pipe out of his mouth, and knocked the ashes out, bringing his shaking old head almost over the table as he did so.

"You must do it to-night, sure, so that I can take the morning train for the West," muttered Sturgis.

"Very well."

The old man, who seemed to be in a state of drunken sleepiness, here fell over so that his head came down on his arms on the table right between the two men.

"You old fool!" ejaculated Gabriel, angrily, as he gave the old man a shake.

"Oh, let the poor old cuss alone. He's allers like that. He'll soon booze himself to death," remonstrated Sturgis, who seemed to be in better humor than usual now he found that Gabriel was willing to help him in his scheme.

The two rascals, so dissimilar in appearance and manner, yet so much alike in their disregard of all law, moral and social, arose and walked behind a curtain that divided the big, rambling room into two parts, and that hid half a dozen comfortable cot beds from the occupants of the kitchen and sitting-room.

Sturgis lay on one, with his clothes on, to finish his night's rest, so rudely broken in the Bowery lodging-house by Iron Hand. As for Gabe the Swell, he undressed himself deliberately and carefully, and laid his clothing out on an unoccupied bed so that it would not get creased, although he took the precaution of emptying his pockets, and placing all his valuables including a revolver and a wicked-looking dirk, beneath his pillow.

And the old man, who perhaps was not so drunk as he seemed, looked up from the table with a rather knowing look in his half-closed eyes, while a peculiar smile played about his mouth.

CHAPTER IV.

VILLAINY SCORES A POINT.

It was twelve hours later, that is, in the middle of the afternoon—and the old man who had been sitting in the cellar on Courtlandt street during the conversation of Jim Sturgis and Gabe

the Swell, was walking slowly up Broadway, apparently in deep thought. Nobody took particular notice of the shabby old fellow, who kept his eyes fixed on the ground under the shadow of the brim of his ragged felt hat, seeming to see nothing of the busy throng around him.

And yet perhaps the old man was not so inattentive as he appeared.

At all events, he stopped suddenly as he reached the corner of Thirty-fifth street, and holding out his hand to a flashily-dressed young fellow standing in the doorway of the Park Theater, said:

"Barney Jerome?"

The young man glanced in the face of the other, and then bending down stiffly, as if he had a joint in the middle of his back, placed his hands flat upon the flagstones, and wiggled his head round and round so fast that it looked like a thousand white plug hats converted into a buzz-saw.

Suddenly he straightened himself and turned a back somerset with a grace and lightness that caused a great deal of astonishment to a small boy, who had watched the whole proceeding, and would doubtless have been a shock to three stylish young ladies just passing, had they not recognized the performer, and laughed admiringly as they went on their way.

"Faith, me b'ye, Oi'm glad to see yez, so Oi am," came forth in a rich brogue from the mouth of the lively young man as he revealed a round, good-humored face, lighted by a pair of twinkling blue eyes.

"I'm glad to see you, Barney."

The voice was not that of an old man, although it came from the lips of one. It had the full, rich tones of a young man in the very heyday of his youthful strength.

"Phwat are yez in that rig for?" asked Barney. "I s'pose yez hev some schame on yer fut, eh? Yer rascal! I know yez. Be jabbers, Oi'd loike ter be a detective meself, so I w'd. Ye git all the excitement ye want widout any of the distractin' doubts about gittin' yer salary that we actors have continually. It's noice ter be called sich a name as Iron—"

"Hush!" whispered the old man. "Not that name here. Some one might overhear."

"That's so. Be gob, that's loike yez ag'in. Full of caution."

"You can use my real name. No one knows me by that in New York."

"Arthur Stanley?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, Arthur, what's on the board?"

The detective (for of course the reader has surmised that the old man was none other than Iron Hand) whispered a few words in Barney's ear.

The young man started back in astonishment.

"Ye don't say so?"

The detective nodded.

"The murderin' villains. Be gob, we'll give 'em a warrum reception."

The two had moved into the lobby of the theater, which was empty at this time of the day, save for the young fellow in the ticket window, who was there to sell reserved seats in advance, but who appeared to have very little to do just now.

Suddenly two female figures appeared in the lobby. One was that of an old woman, and the other of a girl about twenty.

The old woman wore a large bonnet of a by-gone age, that partly concealed her face, which her stooping posture hid still more. The girl was neatly attired in black, with white collar and cuffs, while a broad drooping hat, in the style of the day, shaded her face, and made the fact that her hair was cut short less noticeable than might otherwise have been the case.

Both the detective and Barney started.

"Be jabbers, is it a ghost, or—or am I gittin' bothered?" ejaculated Barney, waving his hand before his forehead to signify that he used the term "bothered" as it is often applied in Ireland, meaning that the brain is muddled.

Iron Hand stepped into the shadow of one of the pillars that ornamented the walls, and glanced eagerly into the face of the girl, as she stood at the ticket window and bought two tickets for the evening performance.

"It is she," whispered the detective.

"Who?"

"Come along, Wilkie, dear," croaked the old woman, as she seized the girl's arm, and drew her away.

She had noticed the eager gaze of the young man and the loud suit of clothes and the white plug hat, and had drawn the girl away as if to save her from annoyance.

But Iron Hand knew that there was some stronger reason, as he slipped from behind the

pillar, and drawing himself to his full height, seemed to sink the old man and the detective.

He straightened the brim of the soft hat he wore, turned down the collar of his coat, arranged his necktie, buttoned his vest properly, and laced up the shoes that he had allowed to look so untidy, and was an altogether different looking man, as he emerged from the theater entrance with the brilliant light of a sunny afternoon on Broadway.

"Say, Arthur."

"Well?"

"Whushper!"

"What do you mean?"

"Be the powers, ye are the greatest change artist Oi ever see, so ye are."

The detective laughed in a gratified way. Most men like to be commended, however sensible they may be.

"Phwy don't ye go on the stage?" continued Barney.

"Maybe I shall, some day."

"Ye would make a divil of a hit if ye did that change act right afore the aujence. An old man, an' then, bang! a young one. It's moighty good now, Oi'm tellin' yez."

The detective did not answer. The two had reached the street and he was looking for the two women.

They had disappeared as completely as if the earth had swallowed them. The only supposition was that they had boarded one of the numerous cars that were passing and repassing in both directions, and had gone no one could tell where.

"Barney, have you time to stay with me all day?"

"Yes, be the powers an' all noight, if ye loike?"

"I shall want you all night," responded the detective quietly.

But few words more were spoken, and they only of the most commonplace character, as the two men rode down-town on the Elevated Railroad and got off at Courtlandt street.

While going down the stairs at the railroad station the detective changed his appearance again, and was the old man by the time he and Barney Jerome reached the street.

The scene was very different from that when Jim Sturgis had squeezed himself under the cellar flap, with the handcuffs on his wrist and made his way to the thieves' rendezvous where he had met Gabe the Swell.

The cellar door was tightly closed now, and over it was passing an almost continuous stream of humanity.

From the door of the house belonging to the cellar, and which was up several stone steps from the sidewalk, a long platform, or bridge, extended to a great wagon. Along this bridge men were walking with cheeses, tubs of butter and other goods, while occasionally a man with a hand truck piled up with the same sort of commodities ran along the platform with the reckless disregard of the safety and convenience of passers-by that distinguishes all such workers in the busy down-town streets of New York.

Iron Hand, in his character of the old man, did not seem to care for the noise and bustle.

He walked along the platform into the house, just as a burly porter, with an armful of cheeses, came rushing down. He saw the old man, and thought it would be a funny thing to run against him and knock him down.

On he came, full tilt, and it seemed as if the old man must go down by the mere weight of the gigantic porter and the heavy cheeses.

But, somehow, he didn't!

Just as the fellow reached him the old man seized him by the wrist with a hand that the startled porter noticed was covered by a kid glove, and twisted him off the platform with as much ease as if he had been a baby.

The man rolled over on the sidewalk, in the midst of his cheeses, and when he had recovered himself he looked around to see what had become of his extraordinary assailant.

The old man had disappeared.

"Well, ef he ain't a daisy, stop my wages for a month," muttered the disgruntled porter, as he began to pick up his cheeses. "My wrist is turning blue already."

In the mean time Iron Hand, with Barney Jerome close behind, had reached a corner of the vast warehouse, behind sacks of grain piled up nearly to the ceiling, and had stamped twice upon the floor. An answering tap came from below. Then the detective scraped with his heel in a peculiar manner, and the floor opened in front of him, showing a space about two feet square.

The detective stepped into the dark hole with the confidence of a man who knows there are

stairs below, and Barney went after him with the carelessness that distinguished all his movements.

The trap closed over his head by some unseen agency, and the two men felt their way along until after passing two doors, that opened for the detective and closed behind Barney in regular order, they found themselves in the kitchen, in which the detective had overheard the conversation of Jim Sturgis and Gabe, the Swell, the night before.

There was no one there.

The detective looked toward the door behind which he believed the old woman and the girl they had seen in the lobby of the Park Theater, were at that moment.

Everything was silent.

"Barney!"

"Well, me jewel?"

"Where's your uncle?"

"Oh, bad 'cess to him! He's at home, I guess. Divil a bit would ye find him out of his house, no matter what time you wint."

"Who's in the house with him?"

"Sorra a one of me knows. I suppose he has that English footman that he always keeps wid him."

"Don't you live in the house?"

"Yis, but the ould man niver sees me. I niver ate a meal in his house yit. I jist slape there, on the top story, but that's all. It don't cost him anything, or he wouldn't let me stay, I guess."

"Still, it is convenient for you to have a room there," suggested Iron Hand.

"Oh, yis, when Oi ain't on the road, Oi'd as soon be there as anywhere else, an' it saves me paying rint. Then Oi kin git me meals anywhere, et the restaurants about town. Besides, old Silas Nuttridge is me mother's brother, an' Oi koid a like to know as he's safe."

"Safe?"

"Yes. He has a great deal of money, an' the ould omadhaun kapes lots of it in the house."

"Yes?"

"Well, if the boorglars knew it, it moight be a timptation to thim, d'ye moind?"

"Ah!"

"Yis, ah, an' ah again, if you loike, but its the fact, nivertheless."

"You're right, Barney."

"In coorse Oi'm roight."

"Yes, there are burglars who—"

"Would rob an' murder the ould man," added Barney, finishing the sentence for the detective.

"Rob and murder!" repeated the detective, musingly. Then he looked straight in the face of Barney, as he whispered to him across the table: "Barney, there is a plot to rob, and perhaps murder, Silas Nuttridge, this very night!"

The young man started and his eyeballs dilated with horror.

"What? To-night? Rob and murder!" he gasped, scarcely knowing what he said.

The detective put forth his gloved hand and shook that of Barney Jerome as he replied:

"Yes. I have brought you here that you might possibly prevent it by following the men who are to do it. If everything else fails, you will have to fight for the old man. He must be saved."

"But—"

"Hush. Let me explain—"

"But, Arthur—"

"No. It is not time for you to talk. Action is the word," interrupted the detective, sternly.

"But why not inform the New York police. Surely thim b'yes would not let the dirty blaggards of boorglars rob a poor ould man, that—"

"No, Barney. We must not trouble the city police. There are too many important interests at stake in this matter. Besides we can prevent any harm coming to your uncle, and trap these varmints at the same time."

"Oi'm glad of it," responded Barney, shaking his head doubtfully.

"They have arranged to do the job to-night, and then one of them will leave for the West with his booty."

"He wull—wull be?"

"That is the plan."

"Well, faith, we'll upset the plan of thim, if Oi know meself. Where are the blaggards?"

The answer came to Barney in a way he did not expect.

Hardly were the words out of his mouth when a sandbag descended upon his head, crushing the white plug out of all shape, and sending him to the floor, senseless.

At the same instant two hands, with long, white, slim fingers, grasped the detective by the two arms, and a foot was thrown behind him so dexterously, that he was lying by the side of Barney just as he recognized in his assailant the man he expected him to be—Gabe, the Swell.

Jim Sturgis stood over Barney with the sand-bag, ready to deliver another blow, should he deem it necessary, while he stole a look full of ugly vindictiveness at the prostrate detective.

But only for a moment.

There was nothing of the old man about Iron Hand now, as he sprung to his feet, and seizing a shoulder of each of the ruffians, shook them till their teeth chattered like castanets.

It was a ludicrous sight, the utter helplessness of the two big fellows in the hands of the apparently old man. What might have been the end of the scene can hardly be conjectured, but suddenly a strong rope with a slip-knot was thrown over the detective's head, and drawn so tightly around his neck that he was choked into insensibility ere he realized that he was attacked.

"Oho, my beautiful young man. Mother Kit is on hand this time, isn't she?" croaked the hag, who was tugging at the rope, which she had passed through a large staple in the wall, and which gave her a purchase on the noose that trebled her usual strength.

The hag wore the dress and bonnet in which she had appeared in the lobby of the Park Theater buying tickets in the afternoon.

She was chuckling over her success in overcoming the detective when the young girl who had been her companion rushed from the room and seizing a carving knife that lay on the table cut the rope at one blow.

"You meddlin' fool, take that!" exclaimed Gabe, as he struck the girl to the floor with a fierce sweep of his white hand.

CHAPTER V.

THE MIDNIGHT PENMAN.

It is midnight of the day on which the events transpired as narrated in the last chapter.

Gabe, the Swell, with his light overcoat disposed with studied carelessness to show his evening dress beneath, has just alighted from a cab at Union Square.

He walks calmly up Fourth avenue, smoking a cigar, and turns into Gramercy Park. There is no moon, but the stars twinkle in the black vault of heaven, and there is light enough to see the trees in the Square waving in the faint breeze and to distinguish the great grim stone houses that form a hollow square around the Park in the center.

Gabe walks leisurely along the sidewalk, his light patent-leather shoes making hardly a sound upon the flat stones, and looks at the houses in an off-hand way, as if he were not thinking of anything in particular.

He had walked half-way around the Square until he had reached a gate in the iron railings. The gate was locked, but one touch of a short piece of steel wire that he drew from his vest pocket settled that, and he stepped inside and took a seat in the deep shadow of one of the spreading maples that offered sure concealment.

He had thrown his cigar away, and now gave his attention to the contents of his pocket, which was sufficiently heterogeneous to be worthy of examination.

Small files, and steel saws like fragments of bell-wire, but with keen teeth that would go through thick bars in a few moments in the hand of a skillful man. A bunch of skeleton keys and a short flexible combination of cane covered with laced leather and tipped at either end with a ball of lead.

Gabe looked at these things in the dim light, and bared his white teeth in a smile that was almost a snarl.

"These will do," he muttered.

He drew a dirk knife from a case in his hip-pocket, and added, significantly:

"Especially with this to fall back on."

For perhaps ten minutes longer he sat under the maple, perfectly still, but on the alert for every sight or sound.

A low, hoarse whistle!

Gabe started.

"What's that?"

Then he leaned back carelessly, as he added:

"A street-car whistle. I thought at first it might be—"

Again the whistle! This time so close that he could not be mistaken. There are no street cars in Gramercy Park, and the whistle proceeded from some other source.

"It must be—"

Gabe did not finish the sentence, but, puckering up his lips, emitted a sound as nearly like the whistle as he could.

"Gabe!"

The word was uttered so softly that it was little more than a sigh.

"Hello!"

"Time!"

"For action!" replied Gabe, the Swell.

Evidently a previously-arranged form of words was being carried out.

Gabriel Collins stole softly to a gate opposite that by which he had entered the inclosure, and with a touch of his useful bit of steel wire forced the lock, and was outside.

"Jim!"

"Hyar!"

"Good!"

The burly form of Jim Sturgis was close against the railings near the gate, where the heavy trees made an almost impenetrable gloom. The eyes of Gabe, the Swell, were like those of a hawk, or he would never have seen his partner at all.

"Come on, Gabe. Let's get at this hyar job. I don't feel safe, an' I want ter git ter Californy ez soon ez I kin. Thar's too many fellers watchin' hyar in New York."

"Jim!"

"Wal!"

"You're a coward."

Gabe, the Swell, spoke in soft, polite tones, but he meant what he said. Sturgis did not answer. He was waiting to see what his companion would do.

Gabe turned as if about to walk across the road to the great, frowning houses, with their heavy stone porticoes, and lower windows barred like those of a jail.

Tramp, tramp, tramp!

The footsteps of a policeman!

The guardian of the peace walked leisurely along on the other side, glancing carelessly at the houses, and stopping for an instant to try the door of one that looked more gloomy and fortress-like than the rest.

Apparently satisfied, he resumed his march, and soon his footsteps died away in the distance with a hollow echo that was almost ghostly at this time in the morning.

"Now, Jim!" whispered Gabriel. "Screw up your courage, if you have any, and come with me."

The Swell had become the man of determined action, although his white shirt bosom still gleamed under his light overcoat, and he looked ready for a social gathering rather than to be prowling about a quiet Square at one o'clock in the morning with burglars' implements in his pockets and an undeniable ruffian for a companion.

Gabe seemed to have his plans already formed, for he walked straight across the street, without hesitation, and down to what was presumably the kitchen door of a heavy house immediately opposite. There was an iron fence and a securely-padded gate in the way, but he made short work of that obstacle, by leaping lightly over.

Jim Sturgis, rather slower and more lumbering in his movements, climbed over it.

If the ordinary houses in this neighborhood were carefully fastened, this one was apparently impregnable.

A heavy oaken door, thickly studded with great iron knobs, could be seen through an iron grating, like the cell-door of a police station.

Gabe bent down, and with the aid of a small steel "jimmy," some pieces of steel wire and the point of a file, turned the bar that held the grated door in place, so that it could be opened.

Five minutes on the oaken door let them into the lower hall, and Gabe gave vent to a noiseless chuckle, as he dropped into a chair and touched Jim Sturgis on the arm.

"Wal?"

"Light."

Sturgis produced a small bull's-eye lantern, and turned the slide so that a stream of light could be flashed up and down the stone passage in which they stood.

"That will do," whispered Gabe. "We don't want to give a fireworks display."

Sturgis closed the slide with a snap.

"And don't make any fool noise," added the Swell, irritably.

He walked swiftly up the stairs, and entered the front parlor, which, rather to his surprise, he found unlocked. Sturgis had told him that the man in whose house they were—Silas Nuttridge—closed and fastened every door in his house, not only at night, but all day long.

Sturgis flashed the light about the room at Gabe's command, and showed that it was a double apartment, with wide folding doors, that were open now, yielding a vista of old and shabby furniture that had once been handsome in the fashion of a bygone time, but was now falling almost into decay.

A heavy desk and bookcase combined, occupied a corner near the shuttered front window,

but the desk was closed and secured by an iron bar across, as well as a lock.

Gabriel Collins stepped over to the desk, and taking the lantern from the hand of his companion, looked it carefully over.

It was one of the kind that shut up, by the desk itself, forming the lid.

Gabe touched the iron bar delicately, with one of his long, white fingers, and smiled in a contemptuous manner at the idea of its keeping any one out of the desk who was determined to get in.

"I guess it is in thar, eh?" suggested Jim.

"You're a fool!" was the curt reply to this observation.

The other humbly accepted the dictum, and followed Gabe from the room.

Gabe Collins was too experienced and of too observant a nature not to feel sure that Silas Nuttridge would never trust a paper that he valued at \$100,000 in a ramshackle desk in a down-stairs room, while he occupied one in another part of the house.

On the floor above they found four doors to as many rooms, but all secured.

The keyholes were covered inside so that it was impossible to look through, but a faint line of light under the door that corresponded to the parlor down-stairs could just be discerned by Gabe's lynx eyes.

"This is the room where the old man sleeps," whispered Gabe.

"How do you know?"

The Swell did not condescend to answer. He was thinking.

In two minutes he had made up his mind what to do. Telling Sturgis to turn the light on the door of the rear room, he set to work with his ever-useful steel wires and picked the lock with neatness and dispatch.

He stepped inside the room and found himself in pitchy darkness.

"Light!" whispered Jim.

"No."

Like a cat, Gabe the Swell made his way about the room, with his handy billy in his right hand, ready to fell any one that he might meet.

He found the bed—an old-fashioned four-poster, with heavy velvet hangings, like a gigantic hearse. Lightly and stealthily his hands stole over the bed within, and he understood the situation at once.

The coverings were turned back, as if some one had jumped out hastily, and the bottom sheet was still warm.

The occupant of the bed, whoever he might be, could not be far away.

Gabe placed his hand on the arm of Jim Sturgis, who had been holding the bottom of the light overcoat and following him about, and warned him to remain perfectly still. Then he continued his investigations.

He found two more doors, both fastened.

Rapidly he pictured the shape and dimensions of the house, and decided that they led into other rooms.

"He is in the front room, and perhaps he suspects," thought Gabe, as, with his weapon more firmly clasped, he made his way to thick portieres that hid the communicating door.

Softly he pulled one of the curtains aside and saw that the door was slightly ajar.

Through the small opening he could make out that the front apartment was fitted up as an office, with an immense high desk, such as is to be found in some mercantile establishments, but of a bygone style. Two square stools, with leather horsehair-stuffed tops, stood before the desk, and the stools and desk were all scratched and so stained with ink that it would have been impossible for a stranger to say of what sort of wood they were made.

The room was brilliantly lighted by electricity, but the position of the door would not allow Gabe to see more than one corner of the interior.

"There is some one in there," he muttered, "and the some one cannot be anybody but Silas Nuttridge. I must go in to him, if he will not come out to me."

He stepped back to where Jim Sturgis stood, in the darkness, like a very ugly statue, set up accidentally, where he was in the way.

"Jim!"

"Wal?"

"Keep watch, and if any one comes into the room, why—" Gabe hesitated.

"Why, what?"

"Brain him!" hissed the Swell, savagely.

"Suppose it's a woman?" hazarded Sturgis, in a spirit of mischief, and with a quizzical smile that—perhaps fortunately for him—could not be seen in the darkness.

"Then gag her, and knock out what brains she has afterward."

Without waiting for anything now, Gabe the Swell skimmed over to the door of the front room and dropped on the floor. Then he cautiously pushed the door open, wider and wider—wider and wider.

There was an ominous creak! The house was an old one, and the heavy doors did not move without some grumbling remonstrances, in the shape of creaks, squeakings and scrapings.

Gabe the Swell lay quite still. He had not ventured into the room at all yet, but he could hear the scratching of a pen, as if some one were writing furiously, and he knew that he was within a few feet of an enemy.

The creak was evidently unnoticed by the person in the room, for the scratching of the pen continued, without a break.

"It's all right. The old fool is deaf, of course. He could not hear me if I was to walk into the room on my heels, I guess."

He pushed the door several inches now, with the result of three or four creaks in quick succession.

The scratching of the pen stopped!

Gabe held his billy in his right hand, and as he noticed that the inmate of the room had ceased work, he held his breath and prepared for a struggle that should end in death for the old man, if necessary.

It was a fateful moment!

Let the unsuspecting old man, scratching away at his paper with his hard pen, cease his work and evince curiosity enough to wonder whether he himself had left his door open, and there would be a wild beast at his throat, who would tear out his life before he could utter more than one cry!

Gabe the Swell meant murder!

He listened intently for the pause to come to an end by the resumption of the scratching.

It was only for a few seconds—although to Gabe it seemed like a quarter of an hour—that the pen was silent.

The scratching began again, and Gabe's nerves relaxed their tension.

He waited a few moments longer, and then slowly and cautiously edged into the room.

The scene was about what he had expected.

At a large square table, with drawers for the reception of books and papers, sat the old man, in a common wooden chair, writing away as if for dear life. His back was toward Gabe, but the white hair falling over his shoulders upon the collar of his coat, and the thick-rimmed silver spectacles coming well over his ears behind, were assurance enough that the old man was Silas Nuttridge, the usurer, and the keeper of the precious paper that would enable Jim Sturgis to get a fortune for the girl he had stolen, and whom he had so firmly under his influence that he could make her give him anything that might come into her possession.

Gabe the Swell had seen old Silas Nuttridge often enough to know him. Many a time he had seen the old fellow on the street, and many a time had he begun to lay out a plan for entering this house and taking whatever of value he might find.

Silas Nuttridge was understood to keep a great deal of cash in his hands, having but small faith in banks.

All this passed through the mind of Gabe the Swell, while he was drawing from his pocket a large white handkerchief, and a small bottle full of colorless liquid.

He arose gently to his feet, while the old man wrote away unconsciously at his large table.

Gabe crept up behind his intended victim, and drawing the cork of the bottle with his teeth, poured some of the liquid upon the handkerchief.

The pungent odor that filled the room proclaimed the liquid to be chloroform.

It was plain enough now, what Gabe the Swell meant to do, although the old man wrote along as industriously as if it had been ten o'clock in the morning, and he had just arisen after a night's sound sleep, instead of being at work at two o'clock, when he should have been in bed, oblivious to all outward happenings.

Suddenly Gabe saw some one moving on the other side of the table facing him.

CHAPTER VI.

A SLICK JOB THAT FAILED.

JIM STURGIS stood still where Gabe the Swell had left him.

He could see the half-open door, partly hidden by the *portieres*, through which Gabe had disappeared, but he did not know what was being done in the front room.

He waited five, ten, fifteen minutes, and then

he determined to go and see, whether he offended his swell partner or not.

He crept across the room as well as he could, in the dark, with his lantern in his left hand. There was very little light from the half-open door, and Jim Sturgis was more clumsy than Gabe the Swell.

He was brought up in his travel across the room by falling over a rocking-chair.

With an impatient oath he strove to save himself from falling, but only to go down in a heap, with the rocker twisted up in his legs.

Strange to say he did not make any noise. He fell on his hands on the soft carpet, and although he hurt himself the more by avoiding a racket, he did not mind that so long as he did not spoil the game they were after.

If Gabe, the Swell, and the old man in the other room heard the noise, they did not betray it by any sign.

Jim managed to disentangle himself from the chair, and had risen to one knee, when—he found himself in more trouble.

Two sturdy arms clasped his, and pinioned them to his side, while some one hastily but skillfully put a rope around them half a dozen times, and secured them so tightly that they cut into his flesh.

Not a word was spoken.

Sturgis had no idea who or what his assailants were, but he felt a soft hand touch his face accidentally once, and he supposed it was that of either a woman or a boy who had never done laborious work in his life.

As soon as he was fastened he was lifted to his feet and dragged to the door by which he had entered.

By this time the desperado had partly collected his senses, that had been scattered by the sudden attack.

"What in—" he commenced, but the soft hand was clapped over his mouth, while another hand, not so soft, seized him by the back of the neck and shook him till his teeth rattled again.

It was not necessary for his assailants to tell him that talking was forbidden. He understood that without words.

Down the stairs he went, with his two captors holding him tightly. He was foaming inwardly, but he could not utter a wail of remonstrance, and he certainly could not resist, for he was helpless in the long cords that were twisted around his arms.

In a few moments he found himself in the hall through which he had entered not long before with Gabe the Swell, and which like the rest of the house, was in black darkness. From the hall he was shoved into a back kitchen.

The hands that had held him were loosed, and before his slow intellect comprehended that he was alone, he heard the door closed and fastened on the outside, and the sound of footsteps ascending the stone stairs to the upper part of the house.

"Now, who in thunderation air them two people ez hez got me inter this hyar fix. Seems ter me I'm meeting with more bad luck than I ever struck in my life before."

While thus ruminating, Jim Sturgis was pulling away at the cord that bound him, but without avail. It would not yield in the least.

"Caught! Like er rat in er trap!" growled Jim.

"Not quite, my dearie," croaked a voice in his ear, as at the same time there was a snip-snap, as of a knife cutting through ropes, and his bonds fell off.

"Kit!" exclaimed the desperado.

"Yes, Kit, dear."

The old woman whose acquaintance the reader has made already struck a match and composedly lighted an end of candle, in an old-fashioned brass candlestick she held.

"Look out, Kit," remonstrated Sturgis.

"Don't fret yerself, darlin'. There's iron shutters to every window, and you might have a bonfire in here without anybody outside knowing anything about it."

The hag spoke somewhat disdainfully. She had not the highest opinion of her companion's courage.

"How did yer get in byar, Kit?"

"How do yer think?"

"I ain't good at guessing."

The old woman nodded significantly.

"That's so. I forgot. You haven't much brains, that's a fact."

Jim did not seem to mind this reflection upon his intellect, for he only repeated his question.

The old woman looked around cautiously as if she feared some one might be within earshot. Then she threw her arms around the desperado's neck and whispered a few words in his ear.

The effect was electrical. He started back, and his face became actually blue with rage.

For a moment he could not speak. His wrath choked him.

Then he made a dash for the door. It was fastened.

"Kit?" he hissed.

"Well, dearie," answered the old woman, in sympathizing tones, that were not free from malicious enjoyment of Sturgis's annoyance.

"Open this door!"

"Which door?"

"You old fool," muttered Jim Sturgis below his breath, for he was too wise to let Kit hear him.

"What did you say, dearie?"

"Can't yer open this door?"

Kit took a bunch of keys from her pocket, and soon found one that would turn the lock.

The door swung open, and Kit blew out her candle simultaneously.

Jim Sturgis dashed at the stairs, with his lantern, which he had clung to through all his adventures, still in his left hand.

He had been up the stairs once, and he knew the way well enough now to find the room from which he had been dragged by his two mysterious assailants.

He listened at the door, which had been pulled to, but not fastened.

Not a sound!

"Go in, dearie. They must be in there," whispered the old woman, who had followed him up with more nimbleness than might have been expected in a lady of her age and build.

"Then ther devil help them," returned Jim, hoarsely.

Cautiously he opened the door and stepped into the room, that appeared just as he had left it, with a faint glimmer of light at the door of the front room relieving the Cimmerian darkness.

Jim Sturgis dropped flat upon the floor. He thought he could find any one else that happened to be in the room while in that position better than if he remained erect and at the same time would not offer a mark for an enemy.

Kit stood stock still behind him.

She did not drop upon the floor, but there was an ugly gleam in her eyes that boded no good to any one that crossed her, if there had been light enough to see it.

For at least three minutes the two worthies remained quiet and motionless. Then Kit spoke:

"Jim?"

"Yes."

"What are you going to do?"

"Wait and see," growled Sturgis.

The hag's response to this surly remark was a hearty kick at the other's shoulder that made him groan involuntarily as he turned partly over.

"Now what are you going to do?" repeated Kit.

"Air yer sure thet you seen her hyar?" asked Jim.

"Quite."

"Wal, then, I'm goin' ter find her. Thet's what I'm goin' ter do. D'ye understand?"

At this moment a slight noise in the other room seemed to change the current of Jim Sturgis's thoughts.

Hastily regaining his feet he stepped to the door, pushed aside the *portieres* and marched boldly in.

Kit had watched this proceeding in a mystified state of mind. She could not hear anything from the other room and it seemed as if Jim Sturgis were simply swallowed up.

"Guess I'll have to go, too," muttered the old woman.

She drew a long knife from the folds of her dress, where it was hidden in a sheath in her belt, and grasping it firmly in her right hand, point downward, hurried after Sturgis.

Kit made her way into the other room cautiously, but not so much so as to prevent her tumbling over Jim Sturgis who had dropped upon his knees as soon as he had got around the door.

"Cuss yer!" hissed Jim.

For reply the hag seized him by the throat with her bony fingers and shook him.

Jim tore himself away, and, gasping silently pointed to the table.

There stood Gabe the Swell, behind the old man, looking straight before him into a mirror. From the position occupied by Gabe, it was evident that he did not know it was a mirror before him. He appeared to be actually petrified.

Jim Sturgis was not a quick-thinking man usually but he understood the situation at once, this time.

With a signal to the hag to be cautious, he gained his feet and stepped lightly up to Gabe, touching him on the shoulder.

The touch seemed to bring him to life as suddenly and completely as if he had been put under an electric battery.

With a subdued cry, he swung his handy billy for a crushing blow upon the head of the unconscious old man.

The blow was well-aimed, and would most likely have reached its mark, but that Jim Sturgis—with his usual clumsiness, and in his eagerness to participate in an attack in which there did not seem to be much danger—caught his foot in a hole in the ragged carpet, and fell upon the old man's shoulder in such a position that he shielded his head.

The consequence was that the billy came down on Jim Sturgis's left arm with what seemed to be the force of a pile-driver, and he rolled over like a log.

Neither Gabe the Swell, nor Kit, could ever tell afterward just what took place at this juncture. The old man displayed extraordinary agility and strength, for one of his age, and apparent decrepitude.

He turned around and with a blow of his right hand, sent Gabe staggering back against the wall. Then Sturgis received a kick, and the old woman found herself sprawling after Gabe.

A click, and the room was in darkness.

The electric light must have been turned off by some one outside the room, for the old man had not raised his hand toward the incandescent light over the table.

Gabe jumped to his feet, intending to renew the fight, and carry out the purpose for which he had entered the house, at all hazards.

But it was not to be. Before he could pull himself together, he, Jim Sturgis, and the hag were hustled into what seemed to be a sort of closet, until its steady sinking told them it was an elevator, much too small for three people. It reached the bottom of the house, and then by some automatic contrivance that they never understood, the door opened, the floor raised, and the three of them were shot into the open air, finding themselves in the quietude of Gramercy Park, where there was nothing to suggest the scene of turmoil from which they had just escaped.

Up-stairs, in old Silas Nuttridge's room, the electric light had been turned on again and there was rather a curious state of things. Silas Nuttridge came staggering in from another room looking frightened nearly to death, while patting him on the back was another old man, enough like him to be his twin brother.

"Have they gone?" quavered the old man who had just entered.

"Yes, I let them go, because I know where to lay my hand on them as soon as I want them," answered the other old man.

"The rascals! The rascals! Well, well, don't go away now. Stay till morning, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Iron Hand," suggested the other, helping the old man out as he threw off his gray wig and whiskers, and revealed himself as the Charmed Detective.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MYSTERIOUS PAPERS.

It is needless to tell how Iron Hand had found his way to the house of Silas Nuttridge, and so successfully personated the old man while he drew Gabe the Swell and his partners into a trap.

Suffice it that the detective was there, and that it was due to his presence that the usurer was not chloroformed and beaten perhaps to death, instead of, as he was doing, poking about among the papers on his great office table.

Suddenly, he uttered a fearful yell.

"What is the matter?" demanded the detective, repressing his inclination to give the old man a crack on the head that would make him bite his own tongue off.

But the old man seemed to be unable to utter anything except inarticulate howlings as his long skinny fingers poked among the loose papers on the table.

"You old heathen!" grumbled the detective, irritated out of his usual patience. "Tell me what's the matter."

He took the usurer by his shoulders and shook him to and fro, until his teeth rattled like beans in a tin box.

Silas Nuttridge made a great gulp, as if he were swallowing whatever it was that impeded his speech, and yelled:

"It is gone!"

"What is gone?"

"The papers!"

"What papers?"

"The papers—the papers—that—that—were worth \$100,000 to me. The papers that—"

The old man recovered himself with a great effort, and then went on with forced calmness. "I will give any one \$5,000 for those papers."

"Um!" grunted Iron Hand.

"Faith, uncle, yez hev med so much n'ise the noight that I couldn't sleep. What's goin' on?" put in another voice, as the jolly, round face of Barney Jerome came around the door.

The old man rushed at him and dragged him into the room, while Barney winked comically over his uncle's shoulder at the detective.

"Aisy, uncle—aisy! You shouldn't be too violent, at your toime of loife."

"Ass!" grunted the old man.

"C rtainly, uncle! Runs in the family, perhaps," retorted Barney, with provoking calmness.

"Evidently," said the detective to himself, as he watched the old man curiously, as if he were some remarkable animal not easily understood.

"You rascal! What have you to do with this outrage? How did those people get into the house unless you let them in? They are some friends of yours, I suppose."

"Uncle, ye know better, an' if yez wuz not me relative, I'd d'ale yez a swipe ez w'd t'ache yez better manners," returned Barney, with just a touch of annoyance in his usually placid manner.

"Yes, Mr. Nuttridge," put in Iron Hand, "you do know better. Your nephew is a friend of mine, and it is due to him that I have been able to block the game of those men who would have killed you had you been alone."

There was something so impressive in the detective's manner that the miser shuddered. Life was very dear to him, although one would hardly have thought so to look at him.

"But—but—they have robbed me," wailed Silas, as his thoughts flew back to the precious papers.

"Only for a while," said the detective, contemptuously. "Can you not understand that?"

"Yes, yes, I know! You say so—but—"

"But nothing! I tell you the papers shall be returned. Only keep quiet."

"What am I to do now?"

"Go to bed."

"What for? I cannot sleep."

"You must try."

Without another word, the detective pushed the old man gently back into the bedroom from which he had lately come, and then shut the door.

It was hardly closed when Silas Nuttridge opened it again and poked his head into the room.

"But, Mr.—Mr. Iron Hand, what about those papers? I will give a reward of \$5,000 for them. Remember, \$5,000! Five thous—"

Iron Hand pushed him into the bedroom, closed the door, and turned the key in the lock.

"Bedad, he'll be mad now indade!" grinned Barney Jerome.

"It's not very polite to make a man a prisoner in his own house, but it is his own fault, and for his own good."

"I hope he'll think so."

The detective was about to say something in reply when a slight noise made him hold up his finger to command silence on the part of his companion, while he listened intently.

Then he smiled as if he understood all about it, and flinging wide open the door of the room with which the reader has already been made familiar as that in which Jim Sturgis had been made prisoner, and in which he had felt a soft hand touch his face, called:

"Come in."

His invitation was responded to by the appearance of the young girl whom we first met on the summit of the Alleghany Mountains in a P. R. R. Express car, but whom we now know to be Lucy Kraft, daughter of Senator Kraft of San Francisco.

"Wilkie!" ejaculated Barney, surprised.

"Lucy," said the detective, without surprise.

"What am I to do?" asked the girl, looking at Iron Hand with an expression that betokened perfect confidence in him.

"Nothing, now. You are quite safe here. I wanted you to see just what villainy this man, Sturgis, had in his mind, and, besides, I did not care to trust you anywhere out of my reach," observed the detective, kindly. "You can go into the room, here, and sleep for a few hours, in perfect security."

He threw open another door as he spoke and showed a neat little bedroom, whose dainty white curtains and hangings were in marked

contrast with the dinginess of the rest of the house.

"This is all so strange," murmured the girl.

"Has not your whole life been strange?" said the detective, softly. "Go in."

He pressed a button just inside the doorway of the little bedroom as he spoke, and an electric light sprung into being, showing that the room was not only cozy, but luxurious.

The girl hesitated no longer, but pressing the detective's gloved hand, went inside and shut the door, without noticing Barney, who was throwing himself into spasms almost, in his efforts to attract her attention.

"Barney!" said the detective.

"Well?"

"Don't be a fool!"

"Faith, that gurrul is enough to make a fool of any mon."

"Why?" asked the detective, sharply.

"Ob, Oi don't mean intintionally. But, faith, Oi niver thought much of her whin she wuz a b'ye an' now she's a gurrul she turns out to be ez purty ez a pictur—prettier than some pictur's Oi've seen."

What further Barney might have said was cut off suddenly by the detective abruptly leaving the room and going into the dark bedroom, as if something had come into his mind that must be attended to at once.

Barney followed him.

Although the electrical appliances about the house were to be found in nearly every room, the detective did not turn on the light in this room. He preferred to be in the dark.

He groped his way to the head of the heavy, old-fashioned bed, and putting forth all his strength, managed to pull it several inches away from the wall.

"Now to find out whether the old man has been telling the truth or not," he muttered.

He passed his gloved hand slowly over the back of the bedstead as if feeling for something.

His search was unsuccessful, evidently, for with an almost inaudible exclamation of impatience he withdrew his right hand and outstretched his left, which was not covered by a glove.

In a moment his search was rewarded.

His fingers had come in contact with a slight inequality in the smooth surface, as if a nail had been driven into the wood from the other side and had almost pierced through.

Iron Hand evidently knew what to expect.

He picked at the little bump with his fingernail, and it came off bodily, leaving a small hole into which he could thrust his finger.

It was now that he used the gloved right hand again. It possessed at least twice the strength of his left. He pulled at the hole as if he would tear it larger, and then something peculiar happened.

A large section of the mahogany slid back, and there was a space about a foot square, in which were number a of bundles of papers, dusty and crisp with age.

"Barney."

"Yes. O'im here."

"Take these papers."

"Oi will."

The detective pulled the bundles of papers out and piled them up in Barney's arms, all except two, that he took himself.

Then the two men made their way to the lighted office room again, and placed their treasures on the great square table.

Quickly, but without any evidence of nervousness, Iron Hand examined the papers one by one, throwing them aside until he came to the two that he had carried in himself.

"So!" he muttered. "Just what I thought."

He placed the two papers in a large, worn pocketbook, and hid it in an inner pocket.

Then he went to the door of the room in which the old man was supposed to be asleep and opened it, and tapped at that of the young girl, Lucy Kraft.

"What's the caper now? Be jabers I don't understand it at all—at all," exclaimed Barney, with a mystified expression on his good-humored face.

"Wait."

"Faith there's nothing else I can do, so I'm bound to wait."

Silas Nuttridge and Lucy Kraft made their appearance at the same moment and the old man started as if he saw a ghost.

"What—what is that girl doing here?" he asked, in a hoarse voice, as he looked helplessly from the detective to Lucy.

"She is here because I brought her here," answered Iron Hand, briefly. "I wanted her to be a witness of the abstraction of the papers that give her the right to claim Senator Kraft

as a father, if the papers were to be abstracted. On the other hand, if we outwitted the thieves, she was entitled to know that such papers existed."

"You—you—are a rascal!" spluttered the old man.

"So are you," was the detective's cool retort.

"It was my secret, and I had a right to keep it."

"Why didn't you, then?"

"I did as long as I could, and now that you are here, as a detective, you have no right to make it known."

"I am not making it known, save to this young girl, who has a right to know it," answered Iron Hand, in his imperturbable way.

"Well, we are neither of us in a position to make anything of the secret now, since those rascals managed to get away with the papers that would prove it."

"You are sure they did get away with the papers, then?"

The old man looked at Iron Hand with a quick glance of suspicion.

"Why, of course I am. They are not here, and I saw that villain holding them in his fingers."

"Um!"

The old man's excited manner had cooled down considerably, but he still kept fluttering over the table as if he were worrying over his precious papers still.

"Mr. Nuttridge," said Iron Hand, quietly, "are you sure there were no copies of those papers?"

"What do you mean?" gasped the miser.

"Only that I happen to know there was a copy made of the documents, that is all, and that this young girl, Lucy Kraft, is entitled to the original."

"Well?"

"Here's a how-de-do!" muttered Barney.

"And that I have the original in my pocket to give to this girl."

With a howl of rage, Silas Nuttridge sprang at the detective, as if he would have rended him to pieces.

The gloved hand seized the old man's wrist and bore him back to a chair.

"Stay there," the detective commanded sternly. "I thought I should catch you in your own trap, and that was one reason why I took the trouble to come to this house to-night to block the game of those rascals who have just left the house with a copy of the papers in their possession."

The old miser's face turned half a dozen colors during this exordium of the detective. He felt that he had been outwitted at every turn.

"You—you—shall answer for this," he growled fiercely. "You are a thief, and you have made your way into my house for the purpose of robbery. And as for you," he continued, with a louder burst of passion, turning upon Barney Jerome. "Don't let me ever see you in my house again. You rascal! You are in the plot to rob me—your own uncle! Yes, you are—you are!"

Silas Nuttridge's breath gave out at this juncture, and he sunk back in his chair, the very picture of malignant, but impotent rage.

"Come, Lucy. I thought it might have been possible for you to stay here awhile in the house of—your uncle—"

"My uncle?"

"Yes; he is not much to be proud of, but he is your mother's brother, nevertheless."

"Are you a devil? You seem to know everything," muttered Silas.

"Not everything, but I know that."

"Well, let her stay here. She is my sister's child, and although I have nothing to thank my relatives for, I do not want to turn the girl out of the house at this time in the morning."

The detective shot a keen glance at the old man.

"Go," he whispered to the girl. "You will be safer here than anywhere. But keep your own counsel. Do not tell anything about yourself, or—about me."

With a careless nod to the old man, he touched Barney Jerome on the arm and led him from the room.

Half an hour later the detective and Barney Jerome were in bed and asleep in a double bedded room in one of the numerous hotels in upper Broadway, after giving orders to the clerk not to have them called until two o'clock in the afternoon.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DETECTIVE OUTWITTED.

WHILE Iron Hand and Barney Jerome were trying to recuperate in the up-town hotel, Gabe,

the Swell, cool, well-dressed, and apparently in the enjoyment of excellent health was sauntering up Fifth avenue, as if his sole purpose in life was to show himself to the afternoon strollers on New York's fashionable thoroughfare.

No one would have supposed that he had played the part of a desperate burglar the night before, and that four or five hours' sleep in a Courtlandt street cellar had been all the rest he had enjoyed since.

At the corner of Thirtieth street, a common-looking man spoke a word as he passed him.

"All right, Jim. They will be out in the course of half an hour. It is two o'clock now," said Gabe, casually, as he looked at a handsome watch.

A stranger, seeing the two men, would have supposed that the handsomely-dressed man was merely telling the other the time.

"What shall I do?"

"Go into the hotel office, and wait for me."

The roughly-dressed man made an awkward bow, which the other acknowledged with Chesterfieldian grace, and the two parted.

"If I'd only had the education uv that feller, I s'pose I might hev lived on velvet, 'stead uv hev'in' ter do just what he sez," muttered Jim Sturgis to himself, as he looked back at the elegant figure of Mr. Collins.

"Poor devil!" was Gabe, the Swell's careless comment as he raised his hat to a gentleman of his acquaintance, who was accompanied by a richly-attired lady.

In half an hour Gabe, the Swell, made his appearance at the hotel counter in which the detective and Barney Jerome had retired, and asked whether Mr. Robinson had come down yet.

Gabe, the Swell, had found out that Robinson was the name registered by Iron Hand.

Mr. Robinson was not down yet, the clerk stated, but he had been called, and would probably be down in a few minutes.

"What was his number?" asked Gabe, and, being told, decided to go up to the room.

"You may as well go, too, Jim," he whispered to the same rough-looking man who was standing in a shadowy corner by the elevator. "And be ready for business," he added, significantly.

"All right."

The two entered the elevator, and were taken to the fourth floor.

"You will find 456 at the end of that hall, and round to the right," said the elevator boy.

"All right."

"Now, Jim," whispered Gabe, "you are sure he took that black leather case, with the diamonds, from you, in old What's-his-name's house, last night?"

"Quite sure. I felt his hand inside my coat just ez he shoved us inter that cussed elevator, an' ez ther door shet, he snatched the case away, an' I know he hed ther diamonds. Cuss him!"

"With all my heart, James," responded the other, lightly. "But now to get them back. You are prepared for a fight, eh?"

"Am I?" asked the other, grimly. "Try me."

"Good!"

Gabe the Swell was satisfied with the belligerent air of his partner, and needed no stronger assurance of his readiness to fight.

A rap at the door of 456. No answer.

Another rap, and—the door suddenly flung open with Barney Jerome in the doorway.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen!"

The coolness of the young fellow actually disconcerted Gabe the Swell for the moment. As for Jim Sturgis, he was completely at sea. Neither of them expected to find Barney Jerome in the detective's room, although they knew he or somebody else had been with Iron Hand when he came to the hotel.

"Who are you?" asked Gabriel Collins.

"Be jabbers! You should know me. You have banged the head uv me wid sandbags an' other things often enough."

"Fool!" ejaculated Gabe impatiently, as he pushed past Barney, into the room.

"Indeed, but ye are perlit, I don't think," grinned the young fellow. "Who are are ye looking for?"

Gabe did not condescend to answer. He made a sign to Jim and the two disappeared down the hall, and by way of the stairs to the lower part of the house. They had not the patience to wait for the elevator. Or, at least Gabe hadn't, which was the same thing.

Hardly had they disappeared when Iron Hand stepped out of a curtained alcove, laughing.

"Phwy didn't yez come out an' rap 'em wan?" asked Barney, with some disgust. "Ye might hev done it widout their knowin' who shtruck 'em."

"I was not quite ready, Barney. I want to

have the warrants ready, and then I'll take the whole gang."

"It will be a good haul he gob."

"I hope so."

An hour later Iron Hand had procured warrants for the arrest of James Sturgis, Gabriel Collins and Kate Donovan, and was smiling to himself as he thought of the discomfiture of the rascals when he should secure them all at one fell swoop.

He and Barney were crossing Broadway as well as they could, for the road was torn up for the laying of the cable, and it was anything but an easy matter to get across at all, when the detective felt something touching him lightly on the breast, just as he reached the middle of the temporary wooden bridge across the ditch.

Iron Hand was an experienced man in the ways of pickpockets, and his first impulse was to clap his gloved hand over the other hand that had already insinuated its way inside his coat and was closing on the black leather case in which were the precious jewels.

Not a word was spoken, but with a violent wrench, the detective not only pulled the hand away, but swung the owner of it over the chasm in which a score of Italians and Irishmen were at work.

"Be jabbers, I'd let him drop inter the hole beyont," remarked Barney, with a laugh. "It 'ud be good for him."

The detective looked into the face of the thief, but he was unlike any one he had ever seen before. Whiskers nearly covered his face, and his dress was that of a cockney swell snobsman. The clothes he wore could never have been made in the U. S., from the funny plaid traveling cap to the clumsy leather shoes with their hobnails.

If any further proof were needed of the nativity of the fellow it was afforded in the broad accent, with its rising inflection with which he squeaked:

"W'ot are yer doin' of? Can't yer let a bloke be? I ain't a-doing nothin' to you, am I? What kind of a bloomin' country is this, eh?"

The detective's answer was to shake the fellow over the pit with his one gloved hand as if he had been a very small terrier.

"I say, w'ot are you doin' of? I never see sich a cove. I'll give you into custody as soon as I see a peeler! You see if I don't. Blarst it!"

Another shake, and the cockney clung convulsively to the detective.

"You rascal! I caught you that time," said the detective, with flashing eyes, as he looked contemptuously at his squirming prisoner.

"Oh, no, you didn't. I wasn't doin' nothin', I tell yer. You bloomin' Yankees think you know everything, but you don't. I'm a respectable gentleman, an' I live in Great Queen street, Bloomsbury, not far from Lincoln's Inn Fields. You ask anybody in 'Olborn 'Ill who Thomas Smith is, an' they'll say as 'e is a gentleman born. That's me. I'll 'ave the law on yer for this. See if I don't, me covey."

All this talk came in hurried gasps and jerks, as the speaker clung to the detective to save himself from being flung into the ditch, where the Italians and Irishmen were working away as if unconscious of all that was going on over their heads.

Barney Jerome enjoyed the scene immensely.

He did not offer any suggestions, because they did not seem to be needed; but he secretly hoped that the encounter would end with Iron Hand pitching the detected cockney pickpocket into the hole among the laborers.

"Now, then, are you goin' ter let me go, or ain't yer?" demanded the cockney.

The detective gave him another hearty shake, causing him to cling to him more convulsively than ever. Then there was a sudden knocking up of the dust as the cockney was swung around and helped across the wooden bridge by the toe of the detective's boot, while Barney Jerome burst into a loud laugh.

"Be jabbers! You fotched him that time. The spalpeen didn't know where he was when you sint him floyin'."

"Yes, the rascal! He was after mischief. But I knew his game before he got a chance to carry it out."

"What was his game?"

"Why, to steal what I had in my breast pocket. I suppose he thought it was a pocket-book."

"But it was—"

"The case of diamonds that belonged to Senator Kraft and that the rascal, Jim Sturgis, managed to steal from the Express car on the Pennsylvania road the other night."

"Oho!" cried Barney. "The blaggard!"

The two were walking slowly across City Hall

Park and soon the detective put his hand to his pocket and uttered a cry of dismay.

"Phwat's the matter?" asked Barney. "Any wan tread on your corns?"

"The—the-necklace!" gasped Iron Hand.

"Phwat d'ye mean!"

"Gone!"

Barney Jerome stopped, looked into the discomfited face of the detective, and burst into a roar of laughter. He held his sides and guffawed with an intense enjoyment that shook him from head to foot.

"Gone?" he spluttered. "Gone? Do yez m'ane to say—Ha! ha! ha!—that yez hev let that monkey-faced cockney get the best of yez?—Ha! ha! ha!—Stole the diamonds off uv yez whoile ye wuz lookin' at him! Begob! But he's a dharlint, so he is—Ha! ha! ha!—Iron Hand the great detective! Buncoed like a Ruben from Jayville! Ha! ha! ha!"

"Shut up! You are attracting every one's attention," said Iron Hand, savagely.

"Can't help it! Be jabers! It's too good a joke!"

"It will not be much of a joke for him when I catch him!" muttered the detective fiercely.

"When you catch him!" repeated Barney, with exasperating significance.

"I shall catch him," returned Iron Hand, with quiet confidence. "Moreover, I have a net drawn around the gang that robbed the Express car that will take in more people than is generally supposed."

"You're mighty mysterious," remarked Barney Jerome, as he followed his companion into a restaurant under the shadow of one of the great newspaper buildings, and selected a hearty supper from the bill of fare.

And while Iron Hand and Barney Jerome were eating steak and potatoes and disposing of sundry cups of remarkably good coffee, the cockney was making his way to the Courtlandt street cellar with which the reader is already well acquainted, hugging the black leather case of diamonds tightly to his bosom in an inside pocket.

But it might have caused some surprise to the detective and to Barney had they seen a change that took place in the appearance of the cockney as he stood in the dark corner of the warehouse behind the piles of sacks of grain, and stamped the signal upon the floor for the opening of the trap and which it will be remembered had been Iron Hand's method of reaching the thieves' kitchen.

The plaid cap and bushy whiskers came off together and were stuffed into a pocket of the plaid ulster, which was thrown open, revealing neat, stylish clothes beneath, while the face freed from the whiskers, was none other than that of Gabe the Swell.

CHAPTER IX.

TRACKED BY FATE.

THE stamping and scraping on the floor with the heel of Gabe Collins's boot brought the usual result.

The trap opened, and Gabe went down the stairs and into the kitchen where he was first introduced to the reader. The man that let him in was Jim Sturgis.

"Well?" interrogated Sturgis.

Gabe the Swell did not condescend to answer. He walked into the other room containing the cot beds—or rather, to the other side of the curtain, dividing the one large room, and opened a large trunk, that, carefully locked, and strapped, stood against a wall.

"Never see such a man!" grumbled Jim Sturgis to himself. "He'd stop to change his clothes if the cops were right at his heels!"

In a few minutes Gabe came into the kitchen again, looking as if just ready for a swell banquet or reception. His attire was faultless, and all traces of the cockney, who had so successfully imposed upon Iron Hand, had disappeared without leaving a hint in either his dress or demeanor.

"Poh! I can taste that cockney dialect in my mouth yet," exclaimed Gabe, with an expression of extreme disgust, as he delicately rolled a cigarette, and commenced to smoke.

"Did you land it?" queried Jim Sturgis.

"Yes," was the brief answer.

"Good!"

"Not so very good," observed Gabe.

"What do yer mean?"

"Sturgis, how long do you want to stay in New York?"

"Till to-morrow night. I'll have ter make arrangements fer taking—Wilkie"—he pronounced this name with a meaning grin—"to California without there being any suspicion

that—Wilkie—and Lucy Kraft are the same person, and I'll have to fix things with Swikey—"

"Swikey?" interrupted Gabe.

"Yes, ther feller ez helped me with that job on ther railroad ther other night."

"I know. Go on."

"Well, Swikey hez some uv ther swag, an' Kit hez some more uv it, ez she got from Wilkie, and yer know, all that hez ter be fixed up."

"In what shape is ther swag?"

"Bank notes."

"Ah! They're safe enough."

"Course they are. Then, you say ez you hev ther diamonds, an' I hev ther papers I want. So why should I stay in New York longer than to-morrow night?"

"You must leave to-night," interrupted Gabe, as he planted his fist emphatically on the table between them.

"To-night?"

"That's what I said."

"What for?"

"Do I ever say a thing without reason, or just for a bluff?" demanded Gabe, with a scowl that was in marked contrast to his usual placid expression.

"No."

"Well, then, do as I tell you."

Sturgis knew his man, and he did not waste any more time in argument.

He went to the door of the room in which Kit and the girl had been bestowed the last time we visited the crib, and tapped sharply.

"Hello!" responded a hoarse voice from within that both recognized as that of Kit, and in another minute the hag made her appearance, her tumbled hair and bloodshot eyes proclaiming that she had just awakened from slumber.

"Where's—where's—Lucy?" asked Jim Sturgis.

"How should I know?" grunted the old woman. "You took her away from me, and that ended my responsibility."

Sturgis made a movement as if he would seize her by the throat, but Kit threw herself into a posture of defense that would do credit to John L. Sullivan, as she croaked:

"Yes, try it, if you dare. I've licked many a better man than you, and I've given you a rough-and-tumble before now, Jim Sturgis, and don't you forget it."

Evidently Sturgis had not forgotten it, for he adopted a whining, expostulating tone, very different from his bluster of a moment before.

"Now, Kit, you know ez she wuz in the thar durned house whar every one seemed to be fallin' over everybody else, an' you know we wuz chucked out uv the elevator inter ther street."

"Well, dearie, I know that."

"Who took her inter thet house? How did she git away from you?"

"Why, didn't you send me a note telling me to send her with the messenger-boy as brought the note? It wasn't my fault if she got away from you afterward, and found her way to her uncle's, Silas Nuttridge, was it, dearie?"

"You—you—witch! Where—where—did you learn anything about Silas Nuttridge being her uncle? And who—who—sent you the note you are gabbling about?" shouted Sturgis, forgetting all prudence in the excess of his fury.

The old woman, with a cold smile, drew a crumpled sheet of letter-paper from the folds of her dress and handed it to Sturgis.

He snatched it from her, and hastily read it by the light of the guttering candle.

"DEAR KIT:—Let Lucy Kraft go with bearer of this. I am waiting close by, but do not think it safe to come in. I want Lucy to help me get that paper."

"J. S."

Sturgis tore his hair with rage, as he stamped up and down the kitchen.

"An' you let her go on account uv sich a paper ez thet when yer might hev known ez I didn't write it. I ain't no scholar, an' I can't write er note like that. Now the girl hez got away from us, an' I'll hev er nice job ter git her back again."

"What made you think I had her here, when you knew she was at old Nuttridge's house, eh, dearie?" asked the hag, in her most insinuating manner, that made Sturgis long to force the candle into her grinning, toothless mouth.

"Why, I supposed you had brought her there for some purpose of your own, and that having got her in, you would have sense enough to get her out," returned the desperado.

"Ah, you made a mistake there, dearie. I went to the house because I knew there was a job going on. You can't fool me, you know, dearie. I've had my eye on the place for a long time, an' when I happened to hear enough of what you were goin' to do to understand where

the job was to be, why, I waited till near twelve o'clock, and then I scooted over to Gramercy Park and watched."

"Say," interrupted Gabe the Swell at this point, as he indolently rolled and lighted another cigarette.

"Well, dearie?"

"You're splendid."

The hag chuckled and went on:

"I watched, and saw you and this thick-skulled Sturgis go into the house."

Sturgis made an impatient movement.

"You old harridan!" he muttered.

"Then," continued Kit, "as you did not take the trouble to fasten the doors, I just followed you in. See?"

"What a clever old darling you are, Kit," observed Gabe, the Swell, gently waving his cigarette.

"That's all there is to the story," added the hag. "It did not take me long to discover that the girl was in the house, and that there were two other strange men besides you two."

"Yes, cuss 'em! We knew that," said Jim Sturgis.

"When it was too late to be of any use," commented the old woman. "If I had been a man I would have brought the girl out and got the papers, too."

"I believe you would, Kit, I believe you would!" declared Gabe, giving the old lady a hearty slap on the back. "You're a beaut!"

"Now, Gabe, what air we er goin' ter do?"

"I told you—get out of New York to-night."

"But—Lucy?"

"We must get her!"

"Whar is she?"

"She is with her uncle, Silas Nuttridge," answered the Swell, quietly.

"How do you know?"

"It matters not how I know. I know it. It would be too long a job to make you understand everything I know."

The hag chuckled.

"Now," continued Gabe, "if we are going to get that girl, it is time we made a move toward it. When we go to California, it will not be much use taking the proofs of his daughter's identity, unless we take the daughter herself. At least that is my opinion."

"Well, how shall we get her?" asked Sturgis, scratching his head in desperation.

"Very simply. All we have to do is to go to the front door of old Silas Nuttridge's residence in Gramercy Park and ask for her."

Sturgis burst into a loud laugh of derision.

"Who's er-goin' ter do the askin', eh?" he inquired, mockingly.

"You!" answered Gabe.

"Not much."

Sturgis shook himself and drew away from the table, as if he could already feel the clutches of the law on his shoulders, as he stood in front of the miser's house.

Gabe laughed.

"Well, no, Sturgis, I did not mean that. I said that in joke. But one of we three must go."

"You?"

"No—not I. It would be as bad for me as for you."

"Well, then, Kit."

Gabe nodded.

"Of course I'll go," said Kit.

"Good girl," cried the Swell, admiringly.

"Why shouldn't I go? They don't know me there, and if they did I shouldn't care. The New York police haven't got anything against me. Have they, dearie?"

"Kit, my fair damozel, you're the fairest of your sex, as well as the cleverest, and, as you say, the New York police haven't anything against you."

"Wal, durn me ef I wouldn't like ter understand some uv this hyar bizness," ejaculated Jim Sturgis. "It's gittin' beyond me."

"Very likely," assented Gabriel, coolly.

"When shall I go?" asked Kit, of the Swell, ignoring Jim Sturgis altogether.

"Now."

"All right, dearie."

She disappeared into her own room, and a few minutes later came back decently attired, as we saw her while walking with Wilkie (or Lucy Kraft) into the entrance of the Park Theater—that is to say, in a quiet black dress, and with a large bonnet of old fashion that nearly concealed her face.

"Well done, Kit. Ready?"

"Yes, dearie."

"Go on then, and good luck."

"Where shall I take the girl when I find her?"

"Bring her down to the New York station of

the Pennsylvania Railroad. Buy your ferry tickets and go into the waiting-room. Be there by eleven o'clock."

"Very well, dearie."

"You will find Jim and me there ready to take the next train for the West."

Not another word was spoken.

The old woman went out by the way the two men had come in, as unconcerned as if she were only going to market and would be back within half an hour or so, although, so far as she knew, she would never be in this place again. She had no baggage to trouble her. She could take a journey to 'Frisco with as little preparation as to the post-office on Broadway, three or four blocks away.

"Now, Jim, where is the money?" asked Gabe, as soon as Kit had gone.

For answer Jim went out of the room in the direction of the front of the house, where, as will be remembered, a freight elevator gave one means of getting in and out, and in a few minutes returned with a frowzy specimen of humanity that he introduced to Gabe as "Swikey."

"How are yer, pardner?" said Swikey, holding out a very dirty paw.

Gabe the Swell looked at the hand curiously then puffed a mouthful of cigarette smoke at it, but did not offer to take it. In fact, he would as soon have thought of taking up a handful of mud.

"Excuse your glove," he murmured in his politest accents. "Jim, hurry up with this business. We have no time to lose. There is a train about midnight, and that one we must take."

Sturgis went into Kit's room, and moving the bedstead, turned aside the ragged old carpet, and with the point of his knife pried up one of the planks of the floor.

To take out twenty packages of notes, each marked \$1,000, was the work of a few moments, as Gabe the Swell looked on in his unconcerned way, and Swikey scratched his head and yawned as if his rest lately had been disturbed—as, indeed, it had.

"Now, that's \$25,000, and I hev one in my clothes, an' Swikey hev one, an' I s'pose Kit hev ther other three. No fear uv ther old girl gittin' left. She's too slick fer thet you bet."

"Then there was \$25,000 altogether, was there?" asked Gabe, quietly.

"Yes."

"A pretty good haul!"

"Yes, with ther diamonds, an' ther papers an' all, it ought ter be pretty good—ef we don't lose ther girl," added Jim Sturgis, grimly.

"We shall not lose the girl."

There was a quiet confidence in the manner and tone of Gabriel Collins that reassured his companions, and they went on with their task of apportioning the money for safe carriage as if the result of Kit's mission was already settled beyond peradventure.

If any of the three suspected the honesty of either or both the other, it was not shown in their actions, for the \$22,000 was disposed about their persons according to convenience, and not with any reference to one having more or less than the other. Evidently the money was regarded as so much impediment, and not as having an immense cash value.

If there was anybody else in the cellar with its ramifications, that had for some time been a resort of a gang of the worst crooks and thieves in New York, there was no sign of their presence.

When Gabe the Swell, Jim Sturgis and the frowzy individual called Swikey made their way into the street, as they did at last, by way of the freight elevator and the front outer cellar, there was not a soul to say good-by to them, and the crib seemed to be utterly deserted.

The three worthies each stepped into the deep shadow of the houses as they reached the street and waited until Gabe, who was the last to crawl out of the cellar, had made everything snug, and by a sign, directed them to follow him down the street toward the river.

"I shall be glad when we are safely out of this," muttered the Swell, in a more anxious tone than he would have cared to let his companions hear.

Even as he spoke, two figures that had been hidden in a dark doorway immediately opposite, glided along the sidewalk on the other side of the street, never letting Gabe and his companions out of sight for an instant.

Perhaps the rascals were in more peril than they feared.

CHAPTER X.

IRON HAND TO THE FRONT.

WE must now return to the girl whose fate seems to be woven with people who evidently

have come into her life by devious paths and without her desire or consent.

Just eighteen years of age, and with an innate refinement that could not be kept out of sight through years of enforced association with people who lived by their wits, Lucy Kraft knew nothing of her origin or her real name.

She just remembered a luxurious room, and a handsome woman who used to sing her to sleep, and whom she had called "Mamma;" but that was long ago. Then she had been taken to a dirty, tumble-down shanty in one of the worst quarters of San Francisco, and had found herself in boy's clothes and answering to the name of Wilkie, with Jim Sturgis for her constant companion out of doors, and old Kit always with her in the house.

Jim Sturgis was supposed to be her brother, and, until lately, if she had been asked to give her name, she would have said it was Wilkie Sturgis, that being the only name she had ever been given in all these years. But of late her memory seemed to have strengthened, and she knew that if she could only get a clew to her origin, she would be entitled to one of the best names in California.

What Sturgis's purpose was in coming to New York she did not know yet, but she had been brought to the house through the detective, Iron Hand, with the assurance that it would most likely lead to her being restored to her family and friends.

Everything was mysterious, but she had perfect confidence in the detective who had contrived to make himself known to her since her arrival in New York, and who had soon given her assurance that he would set her right if she would only trust in him. Stranger to her though he was, she could not help believing in him implicitly from the first.

No sooner had Iron Hand and Barney Jerome left the house of Silas Nuttridge on that eventful night—or, rather, morning—than Wilkie, as we will continue to call her, retired to her room, and locking herself in, threw herself upon the bed and fell asleep. She was utterly exhausted.

How long she slept she could not tell, until she had thrown open the heavy shutters and admitted the bright sunlight that told her—used as she had always been to judging of the time of the day by the position of the sun in the heavens—it was about one o'clock in the afternoon.

Her toilet was soon made, and then she opened the door and found herself in the large office-like room in which she had seen Silas Nuttridge, Iron Hand, and Barney Jerome just before she retired.

The room was empty now, and the heavy shutters being partly open, admitted the sunlight in a stream across the chair that had been occupied by the detective in the disguise of the old man when Gabe the Swell and Jim Sturgis made their attack.

The girl was standing irresolutely by the big office table when a voice broke upon her ear:

"Hif you please, miss, marster is waitin' breakfast for you down-stairs."

A footman over six feet high, attired in a gorgeous livery of blue and gold stood before her, looking straight ahead with the stony stare peculiar to British flunkies.

"You mean Mr. Nuttridge?" asked Wilkie.

"Yes, miss."

"I am coming."

The flunkey turned himself around, as if he were a wooden man on a pivot, and held the door open so that she might pass out. He followed her into the hall, led her into the elevator, and swiftly brought her to the main floor.

Into the back parlor, that looked into a dismal, high-walled yard from its wide window, Wilkie was shown, and there she found Silas Nuttridge sitting at breakfast.

The breakfast was a good one—coffee, tea, meat of several kinds, and all the etceteras that go to make up a good meal for a rather fastidious person. It was evident that the old miser did not let his pinching extend to his own comfort. He made enough by cutting down on people, and found it unnecessary to stint himself.

However much he may have been disturbed by his nocturnal visitors and their taking away of his precious papers, he betrayed no sign of it this afternoon. He nodded to Wilkie, and helping her to steak, potatoes, and toast, motioned to the flunkey to pour out tea or coffee, and then returned to his meal, taking no further notice of his niece or the flunkey.

There was a bottle of champagne in an ice-pail by his side, and after awhile Silas raised his eyes to the man, who, knowing his duties from long use, opened the bottle and poured out a glass of wine for his employer.

Silas drank two glasses of wine in quick suc-

cession, and then leaned back in his chair and looked at the girl curiously.

"Do you know who you are, girl?" he asked, at last. "Do you know your father?"

Ere she could reply, the door of the room was burst open violently, and something struck the tall footman in the middle of his back with such force that he was doubled up backward in an instant, and sprawled over the carpet like a man who had lost all control of himself.

At the same time a little old woman in black with a large bonnet that almost concealed her face, rushed up to the girl and hugged her so hard that she gasped again.

"Oh, my dear young lady! To think of you being here, and I didn't know it. Silas Nuttridge, are you going to see that your niece gets her own again, or is all the talk you bothered me with this morning nothing at all? You didn't tell me she was in the house. You only said she was in New York. But I suspected, and I just made up my mind I would come over and see for myself."

The old lady, who had a sharp voice as well as a sharp nose and sharp black eyes, here happened to notice the flunkey still sprawling on the carpet, apparently without any idea of getting up.

"You great idiot! Come out of that!" she squeaked, in contemptuous rage.

The old lady made a dart at the breakfast-table and seized the teapot.

The flunkey saw what was coming, and did not wait for it. In another instant he would have been deluged with hot tea, and he knew it.

His short coat-tails disappeared around the door before the old lady had got the teapot well in hand, and she had to content herself with shaking her hand ominously at the doorway as she replaced the teapot and smothered her ruffled plumage.

"Now, Silas, what do you mean by all this?" she demanded, as she stepped to the ice pail and poured out some wine in a teacup.

"Margaret—" he began feebly.

"Don't Margaret me, you unnatural old rascal!"

The old lady said this calmly enough, but she evidently meant it, nevertheless.

"But, Margaret, didn't I come to you this morning and tell you all about it, and about the papers that would prove her to be—to-be—"

He hesitated for he suddenly remembered that the girl Wilkie was listening to every word.

"Oh, go on, Silas. It is time she knew who she was. Don't be afraid of telling the girl her own name."

The old lady had passed her arm caressingly around the girl's shoulder and was soon smoothing her hair with a gentle touch.

"Well, Margaret, I suppose—" went on Silas, doubtfully. But the other cut him short impatiently:

"Suppose? Suppose nothing. I'll tell her. Then to Wilkie: "My dear, your name is Lucy Kraft. You are the daughter of Senator Kraft, of California. Your mother is dead, and your father has just taken another wife, who may be good for a step-mother, and who may not, I don't know her and can't say."

"Margaret, ain't you talking too much?" interrupted the old man.

"Shut up."

"Yes, but—"

"Shut up, I tell you."

There was no mistaking the commanding tone of the old lady, but Silas Nuttridge was evidently desperate, for he went on:

"Secrets can always be sold, and—"

"And you would sell a secret to your own sister's child, would you, you old rip."

Silas Nuttridge winced.

"But, tell me, is this true?" put in Wilkie, eagerly. "Senator Kraft, one of the richest men in 'Frisco. Jim had a job to go through his house once, and—and—"

"Poor child," murmured the old lady, still smoothing her hair.

"And I should have been one of the robbers of my own father."

"How is that?"

"They always made me take part in their jobs, although I hated it so."

"The villains! Oh, I should like to get my hands on them. But, I will, yet," exclaimed the old lady, shaking her fist at Nuttridge, in the absence of Jim Sturgis. "But how did you get your education, child? You do not talk as if that had been neglected."

"No. Jim had me taught by regular professors, who used to come to our house, and asked no questions, as a condition of being well paid. But the more I learned, the worse I felt about the life I was compelled to lead—shut out from

the world, and never seeing any one, but Jim and Kit."

"Kit! Ah, I shall have something to settle with Kit. I have heard of her, although I never saw her," muttered Margaret, between her teeth.

"And now, shall I be restored to my father, and kept away from Jim and Kit, and the awful people I have met in New York?" asked Wilkie, clinging convulsively to her companion, while Silas drank another glass of wine, and looked in a bewildered manner from one to the other.

"Yes, indeed you shall. Get your hat on," she commanded, peremptorily.

"There it is. I brought it down with me," said the girl, pointing to a side-table.

Twenty minutes later, Wilkie (or Lucy Kraft, as we shall call her hereafter), and her newly-found aunt—for that was the relationship, Margaret Nuttridge, Silas's sister, bore to her—were on Fourteenth street, visiting the different dry-goods, millinery and shoe stores, with the result that Lucy found herself with an entirely new wardrobe.

A large front room over one of the business places on the north side of Fourteenth street was the domicile of eccentric Margaret Nuttridge, and it was here that the transformation of Lucy Kraft was completed. Her clothing was quiet in hue and cut, but it was rich and fashionable, and it was with unaffected admiration that the old lady looked at the beautiful young lady standing before a tall pier glass and putting the finishing touches to her toilet with dainty hand that was one of her heritages from her aristocratic parents.

The old lady, in her old-fashioned bonnet and black dress, strutted proudly by the side of the beautiful girl up Broadway. She saw the loungers of that famous thoroughfare look at the sweet face and admire the general appearance of her who had been the companion of thieves—although not contaminated by them—since her early childhood.

The evening was pretty well advanced when the old lady and Lucy stood on the pavement in front of Silas Nuttridge's door in Gramercy Park, and waited till it should suit the pleasure of the big flunkey to admit them.

"For," as the old lady declared, with an emphatic nod, "I am going to have it out with Silas Nuttridge this night, and put my niece right with the world."

Hardly had the words passed her lips, when some one seized the arm of Lucy, and a voice, very much like that of Margaret Nuttridge, but with a harsh twang all its own, exclaimed:

"My dearie! My dearie! Found you at last! Come home! Come home!"

There was a scuffle, as the new-comer pulled at Lucy, and Margaret pulled the other way, and then a closed carriage dashed up and the driver threw the door open.

"Kit!" cried Lucy, in terror.

"Yes, Kit, dearie! Your own Kit!" responded the woman, holding her arm, as the old-fashioned bonnet and black dress, almost a duplicate of that worn by Margaret Nuttridge, was brought into full view in the light from the open doorway of the house, with the big flunkey standing like a statue.

"Kit," screamed Margaret.

She made a clutch at Kit's bonnet, but Kit, active as a cat, dodged and gave the other a stinging slap in the face that knocked her against the big footman, and bewildered her for the moment.

By the time she had recovered herself she heard the door of the carriage close with a snap, saw the driver mount nimbly to his seat, and found that Lucy had disappeared.

"Stop! Stop! You rascal!" she shrieked, as she rushed wildly into the road, with an insane idea of following the carriage that was just turning the corner of the street, while the driver was lashing his horses into a gallop.

A hand, in a kid glove, was placed on her arm, as a calm voice said, in her ear:

"You need not try to catch that carriage, but I will look after the girl."

"Who are you?" demanded the old lady, turning sharply upon the speaker, who was looking at her with piercing black eyes.

The footman had partly awakened from his professional apathy, and was on the other side of the stranger.

"Ere, young-feller! 'Oo are you, don't yer know? Hanswer the lady's question, will yer? We don't allow no strange coves around 'ere at night."

The footman was very dignified, but he lost his dignity in a moment when the stranger seized him by the arm with his gloved hand, and lifting him as if he were a rabbit threw him

through the open doorway into the house and pulled the door shut with a slam.

"W'y that bloke must be the detective as I've 'eerd of—Hiron 'And," muttered the bewildered flunkey as he pulled himself together in the hall.

CHAPTER XI.

A STRUGGLE IN THE DARK.

"I'm going with you," declared Margaret Nuttridge, as the door of old Silas's house closed.

The detective—for it was Iron Hand—looked down at the old lady with rather a discomfited air as she clung to his arm with a sublime disregard of his desires in the matter.

"Do you know where I am going?" asked Iron Hand.

"I know where you said, and that is enough for me. You are going after my girl, and I shall go with you."

"Then come on," responded the detective. "There is no time to lose."

He led the old lady off unceremoniously, and soon had her in a Broadway car, bound downtown by the devious ways resulting from the tearing up of the main thoroughfare for the new cable road.

"Have you plenty of nerve?" asked Iron Hand, when they had alighted from the car and were making their way toward the North river.

"Try me," was the grim response.

"You'll do!" thought the detective.

He did not express any audible comment, however, for they were just passing the place on Courtlandt street where the crooks' retreat was hidden beneath a very innocent-looking wholesale provision warehouse.

The cellar was closed, and the heavy doors of the main entrance were secured with bar and padlock, as if they guarded piles of gold and greenbacks, instead of cheese and tubs of butter.

"Would give something to know whether there is any one in the crib," muttered the detective, as he glanced sidelong at the house, without slackening his pace.

A tremendous slap on his back knocked him almost over the lady trotting at his side, as a hearty voice exclaimed:

"Be the powers, Art'ur, Oi t'ought ye'd niver come, so Oi did."

The detective grasped the speaker by the back of his coat and shook him in the air, playfully, as easily as a big dog would a rat, saying:

"Barney, my boy, don't think."

Barney Jerome did not reply. He simply fell into the rear as soon as the detective released him, and walked composedly down the street.

There was the usual crowd of howling back men and hotel runners outside the station of the Pennsylvania Railroad, at the foot of Courtlandt street, but Iron Hand took no notice of them beyond giving them the quick, professional glance that took in everything at a sweep, and exchanging a scarcely perceptible greeting with the big police officer, who made a half motion to touch his helmet in response to Iron Hand's nod, and cut it off before the salute had hardly begun.

The detective bought three ferry tickets and ushered his two companions into the great waiting room, that is, as every one knows, as comfortable as that sort of places always are.

There was a pretty large crowd, pushing and squeezing through the doorway to the ferry wharf, for the door had just been opened, and the boat that was to go over to Jersey City was grinding and rocking in the slip, with the usual accompaniment of rattling chains and shrill cries from newsboys and bootblacks.

Not a sign of the people the detective sought was to be seen. Gabe the Swell, Kit and the girl might be among that throng, but if they were they kept out of sight.

Iron Hand led the way to the boat, and instructed Margaret to take her seat in a corner of the ladies' cabin, just inside the doorway. Then he took Barney out to the wagon deck, that was occupied by carriages and late working wagons, and led him into the darkness by the side of the engine-room.

Quick as thought the detective changed his appearance, with the aid of his gray wig and beard, and a few smaller articles of attire deftly arranged, and became again the old man who had deceived Gabe the Swell and Jim Sturgis in old Nuttridge's house.

"Now, Barney!"

"Well, me bhoy?"

"Let me see what you can do in the way of a lightning change without any make-up."

"All roight! I'm wid yez, bedad!"

The young man was known as a protean artist in the profession, and often gave monologue en-

tertainments, in which he personated a score of different characters in full view of the audience.

He proved his skill now in a few minutes.

The white plug hat he wore was crushed, with a few deft twists and squeezes, into a nondescript sort of slouch, picturesque and not ungraceful. From one of his pockets he produced a small tin box, containing several sticks of what actors call grease-paint. With a brown stick he made his face swarthy as that of a Mexican, and a black mustache from the box, stuck on his lip, converted the merry Irish countenance into that of a native of the land of the Montezumas in a moment. It only remained for him to tie his silk pocket handkerchief around his head, so that it just showed beneath his slouch hat, and there was very little to suggest Barney Jerome in the dark-browed, scowling stranger, except the loud suit of clothes, and even that seemed to become less aggressive when seen in conjunction with the decidedly Mexican visage.

"Arrah! Now! Phwat de ye think uv this?" he asked, in triumph, as he moved a little into the light that came from the open window of the engine-room.

"It is good, all but that confounded accent of yours," returned Iron Hand, with a smile.

"Who ever heard of a Mexican with a Galway brogue that you could grind an ax on?"

"Thrus fer yez, but phwat can I do with it?"

"Just keep your mouth shut. That's all."

"Ah? Faith! It's a hard task ye are settin' me. But Oi'll do me best. Now, lead on."

"Walk around to the bow of the boat, as soon as she starts, go through the men's cabin, and meet me on the after deck. I'll go through the women's cabin. We are sure to catch them if they are aboard."

"And if they ain't aboard? What then?"

"They are on the other side of the river, and we shall catch them in the station," returned the detective, with quiet confidence.

At this moment the clanging of the bell, and the hissing of steam, mingled with the throbbing of the engines, told that the boat was on the move.

The two men departed on their respective trips, through the cabins, and in less than three minutes Iron Hand, Barney and Margaret Nuttridge were standing in the darkness of the after deck, holding a council of war.

"We had better go around again, I think," suggested the detective. "We may have missed them. There are a great many people on the boat, and I was not quite sure of a group standing at the railing in the bow."

"Anything you say," was the response of Barney. "But, be gob, Oi'll shware none of the blaggards got past me."

The detective had been standing with his eyes fixed on nothing in particular, apparently, when suddenly he darted forward, and seized by the throat a man who had been sitting, hugging his knees between the wheels of a wagon just behind Barney, and the old lady.

"I have you this time, Gabe! It will be no use trying to get away," said Iron Hand, as he pulled the man out with his powerful gloved hand.

"Not yet, curse you!" hissed Gabe, as his right hand shot out in the endeavor to deal Iron Hand a desperate blow in the mouth.

But the detective was an experienced boxer, and he stopped the fist of his assailant with an upward movement of his left arm, at the same time dealing an open-handed slap with his right that sent Gabe spinning and almost knocked Barney Jerome off his feet.

"Ow! Ye t'ief uv the wurrold! Oi'll knock the eye out uv yez, so Oi will," howled Jerome as he sprung at Gabe with an Irishman's delight at finding a fight ready to his hand.

But he never reached Gabriel Collins.

A burly form jumped out of the gloom from somewhere, and Barney found himself in the arms of a powerful enemy who was squeezing him so hard that it seemed as if all his breath would leave his body.

"Durn yer ugly picter. Who'd expect to see er half-backer Greaser in New York. Come out uv hvar, or I'll flatten yer out," growled Jim Sturgis—for he it was—as he put a little extra pressure on.

Now a test of strength and skill took place between Jim Sturgis and Barney Jerome that prevented their seeing anything but each other.

As stated already Barney was an athlete and an acrobat. He had had experience in the circus ring, and could twist himself into any shape that was possible to a human being, and indeed into some that would be impossible to the average man or boy.

He remembered the injunction of Iron Hand not to talk, so he did not reply to Jim Sturgis's

taunts, more especially as he needed all the breath he had for the contest in which he found himself so unexpectedly engaged.

He realized at once that he was no match for his antagonist in strength, but that he must rely upon his agility and knowledge of the tricks of wrestling if he was to be the victor.

He did not know whether Sturgis had recognized him or not, but he knew Jim, and was determined that he would not only teach him a trick or two in wrestling, but would make a prisoner of him in the bargain.

For a moment the two men paused in their efforts to throw each other after the first onslaught, although Sturgis still held Barney in an iron grasp that did not relax in the least.

Hidden as they were by the wagons, the men taking part in this fracas were unnoticed by others on the boat. The drivers of the wagons had walked forward and were chatting in utter innocence of anything unusual going on in within a few yards of them.

The steady clank-clank of the engine, the hissing of the steam, and the indescribable sound of the rudder chains as they tightened or loosened in obedience to the wheel in the hands of the watchful pilot, made din enough to hide ordinary sounds, and twenty people might have scuffled over the muddy deck without any one being the wiser.

"Let go me arm, yer deuced jackass!" growled Jim Sturgis, in Barney's ear.

Barney didn't answer.

"D'ye hear me?"

No answer!

"Yer cussed Mexican! I'll chuck yer overboard, right hyar!"

There was no doubt about the willingness of the desperado to do what he threatened. The only thing that held him back was the sturdy clasp of the young fellow who stuck to him like grim death.

Barney knew he was in a tight place, but he enjoyed it keenly.

"Chuck me overboard, eh?" he thought. "We'll see!"

He had been saving his breath during the ravings of his antagonist, but his brain was active.

Barney did not care to throw Sturgis overboard, but he would rather do it than be pitched into the brown waters of the North River himself.

He had been slowly and slyly forcing himself downward in the hope of getting an effective underhold upon the other.

Now was the supreme moment!

Summoning all the strength he had, he dropped to one knee, dragging Jim Sturgis with him.

The sudden movement forced Sturgis to relax his grasp a little.

Like a cat Barney Jerome twisted and turned, and got free enough to place his arms around the burly form of the ruffian just below the hips.

Then, straightening himself with a jerk, he accomplished his intent.

Taken off his guard, Sturgis lost control of himself, and before he realized the trick, he was flying over the head of the Irishman into space.

The calculation of Barney was that Sturgis would pitch on his head on the deck. If he had, the chances are that he would have lost all interest in subsequent proceedings, for a time, at least.

As it happened, he did not reach the deck.

There was a wagon, half-full of street scrapings, just behind the combatants, and into this Jim Sturgis plunged, head-first.

Always quick to see the ludicrous side of everything, it was no wonder that Barney Jerome burst into a loud guffaw.

The spectacle of Jim Sturgis floundering about in the filth of the wagon trying to get the mud out of his eyes and mouth, and spluttering with rage, was a sight to make a graver individual than the fun-loving young Irishman laugh.

Barney found it difficult to hold back an exclamation of delight.

Nothing would have afforded him greater relief at that moment than the utterance of a regular Irish whoop. But he restrained himself.

It was only for a second or two that he would have had an opportunity to say anything. Sturgis, mad with rage, was about as quick in his movements as Barney.

A dash at his eyes and mouth with his grimy fingers, and he leaped out of the wagon, full upon the shoulders of the young man.

The two were rolling over and over among the wheels and horses' feet, and the struggle was more desperate than ever.

The boat was so nearly across the river now that the warning bell of the pilot was ringing out orders for the engineer, and the engine was

stopping, reversing, going on a turn or two, etc., as it always does when the ponderous ferry-boat is trying to make the slip without crushing too much to one side or the other.

Barney felt that he must overcome his man quickly, if he was to do so at all.

Once let the boat get into the slip and the wagons begin to roll away and somebody would be sure to interfere, with the result of Jim Sturgis escaping, and the girl being spirited away beyond the reach of her friends.

Grasping Sturgis around the waist the young Irishman forced his chin into the chest of the burly rascal and bent him backward.

This was not a mere effort of strength, but a skillful trick practiced by every athlete who excels in the art of wrestling.

It was effective in this case.

Sturgis felt as if his back were breaking, but he could no more resist the power of that chin than he could if the chin were a battering-ram.

"You cussed Greaser!" he howled at last, just as the wagons began to move, at the same time giving way and falling in a heap to one side.

Barney drew back his fist, with the benevolent intention of giving his opponent "a n'ate droive from the shoulder," as he would have expressed it, when Sturgis rolled over and over under a wagon to the other side, and, jumping to his feet, dashed away among the horses and vehicles, for the gang-plank.

CHAPTER XII.

A TREACHEROUS SLASH.

BARNEY JEROME had been so much occupied with his own affair with Sturgis that he had not had time or opportunity to see how his companion fared.

From the moment that Iron Hand swung that powerful gloved right hand at Gabe the Swell, and sent him spinning against Barney, the young Irishman had had enough to do in holding off Sturgis, without paying attention to Iron Hand.

Fortunately, the detective was not the man to depend upon his friends when fighting was in order.

The blow he gave Gabe was a hard one, and might have settled the business for a less wiry and active man.

But it only temporarily disgruntled Gabe the Swell.

He recovered himself in an instant, and sailed into the detective with the coolness and scientific assurance of an old hand with the gloves.

It was not the policy of the detective to engage in a sparring-match just now, however.

He was too shrewd not to suspect that Gabe Collins would resort to any device to keep his attention off the main object—that of recovering the girl and the large fortune that had been stolen from the Express car.

Gabe knew that the detective was fully informed as to the connection he had with the robbers, if not with that particular robbery—and he expected nothing less than the State Prison if he could be taken with the wealth in his possession.

So, although there might be some danger of his being arrested if he stayed to spar with Iron Hand, it was not so great as that he would have to face if the steel handcuffs were clapped around his wrists at once.

The detective, therefore, was calculating how he could best bring the contest to a speedy close, even while he was giving and receiving blows that did not do any particular harm so far, on account of the care with which each combatant guarded himself.

Sturgis and Barney were struggling at the side of the wagon, and the detective had but little fear of the result there, knowing that the young Irishman had nearly as much strength as his antagonist, and a great deal more agility and science.

Iron Hand was older and cooler than Barney, and could keep a watchful eye upon his surroundings even while trying to hold a by-no-means-to-be-despised foe at bay.

As for Margaret Nuttridge, he could see her just inside the cabin, looking away from him as if something very interesting had caught her vision inside.

For a moment she stood there, and then she disappeared.

"Wonder if she has Lucy," thought the detective, as he administered a tap on the point of Gabe Collins's aristocratic nose, to teach him manners.

Gabe came back at him with a rather painful blow in the eye that made him see stars.

This warmed up Iron Hand a little. He was

but human, and a smack in the eye is calculated to stir up all the fighting blood in one.

So he went at Gabe hammer and tongs for the next thirty seconds, driving him backward toward the end of the boat.

One mighty blow, in return for a light tap in the mouth, sent Gabe backward with terrific force against the light iron gates, and they gave way as if they had been of match-wood.

Gabe Collins had fallen on his back, with his head over the chain, that for greater safety is always stretched across the end of a New York ferry-boat.

He was too good a boxer to lie there, however.

He sprung to his feet, and, throwing his arm around the detective's neck, held him in a firm grasp.

This position, when the opponent's head is under your arm, is known in sporting parlance as having your man "in chancery."

Gabe the Swell had now lost all caution. His sole desire now was to thrash Iron Hand as much as possible.

Although he had recognized the detective through his disguise as soon as he received the first slap, he was not disposed now to act with the caution the discovery demanded.

He was simply a sore and smarting man, and wanted revenge in kind.

No sooner, therefore, had he got the detective's head tucked under his left arm, than he drew back his right to pummel away as long as he could retain his advantage—a purpose which did not suit Iron Hand.

There was but one thing to be tried, and he tried it.

He could not pull away his head, so he did not attempt it. But he twisted himself so as to make the footing of the other uncertain. Then, with a "back-heel," he threw Gabe to the deck, with his face actually overlooking the boiling waters at the stern of the boat.

It seemed to the detective as if his own neck would be broken, for Gabe held to him with all his strength.

"Now, curse you! We'll both go into the river together!" hissed Gabe.

"Not we! You will never take chances on drowning. Your destiny is a rope!" was the derisive retort.

It was not the habit of Iron Hand to bandy words with the men he was hunting down, but it must be remembered that the circumstances were unusually exciting, and that it was hard to restrain even an experienced detective's tongue at such a moment.

"Will you let me go, if I let you up?" asked Gabe, hurriedly.

"That's neat."

"What do you mean?"

"Can you prevent my getting up, if I want to do so?" queried the detective, with a smile through his gray whiskers that almost maddened the Swell.

"Try it!" he growled through his white teeth, that gleamed ferociously in the dim light that came from the open cabin to the lonely spot on which they lay wrapped in a deadly embrace.

"I will!"

The detective put forth all his strength and tried to release himself; whereat Gabe smiled, as he demanded:

"What are you going to do?"

"This!"

He made a movement as if to try again to release his neck from the grasp of that sinewy arm, then with a squirm that took Gabe wholly by surprise, he edged nearer to the stern, and with one last look into the eyes of the crook, deliberately fell overboard, pulling Gabe Collins with him!

There was a roar in the ears of the two men as the waters, foaming around the rudder, closed over their heads.

Gabe involuntarily let go of Iron Hand and struck out to swim, but, as he did so he felt a hand grasp him by the collar, and found himself being dragged through the water at a terrific rate.

Before he had thoroughly collected his thoughts he heard the voice of Iron Hand coming seemingly from the water beneath him:

"Try and catch the chain with your left hand."

Instinctively he tried to obey.

"Where is it?" he gasped.

"Here!"

He tried to make out what he was to do, but the struggle with his powerful adversary on deck, and the plunge into the river, seemed to have taken away nearly all his strength.

"I can't do it!" he exclaimed, and his sense of his own weakness was almost pitiful.

The hand on his collar dragged him a little

more, and then he felt himself swing around so that a rusty grating chain actually thrust itself into his hand.

He held it with the tenacious clasp of one saved from death.

But, what of Iron Hand, and how did he manage to keep his hold upon the boat?

The explanation is simple when we remember the extraordinary strength he possessed in that right hand that was never seen uncovered by the kid glove.

As he fell, with Gabe Collins, over the edge of the boat, he was immediately over the rudder.

The rudder was controlled from the pilot-house, by two heavy chains, one on each side, that dragged it to port or starboard, at the will of the pilot.

At one of the chains the detective grasped as he fell.

His aim was true, and although he went down below water at the first plunge he did not let the chain slip away from him.

Nothing but an extraordinary—a phenomenal—strength in his hand, wrist and arm, could have prevented his relaxing his hold.

As it was, the jerk seemed as if it would pull his arm out of the socket, he having the weight of Gabe Collins to support, in addition to his own.

The two men were now hanging to the chains one on each side of the rudder, the detective still holding the collar of the Swell.

"Well, Gabe!" said the detective, as coolly as if he had been talking to him across a supper table.

"Well?"

"I have you now, haven't I?"

"Have you? Not much you haven't!"

"You'll soon see."

The bells began to clang and the rudder to turn violently as the speed of the boat slackened. They were coming into the slip.

The movements of the rudder, accompanied by the slipping of the chains through the hawse-holes, gave the two men all they could do to hold on.

There was a great deal of bumping, as the boat struck the piles on one side and then went blundering over to the other according to the almost immemorial custom of the New York ferry-boats and the two men held on for their lives.

We know what Barney Jerome and Sturgis were about at this time, but of course their movements were a sealed book to Iron Hand and Gabe the Swell.

How to get out of this predicament and at the same time keep his hold on Gabe was what was troubling Iron Hand at this moment.

Underneath the boat as they were, there seemed to be no chance of their regaining the deck.

To drop into the river and swim would not afford any solution of the problem.

Iron Hand could swim like a duck. So could Gabe, the Swell. But it was not to be supposed that Gabe would enter into any arrangement to swim to the dock with the certainty of being arrested as soon as he got there.

Gabe, was a shrewd fellow, and he knew that the detective had gathered the net completely around him and his associates, and was only desirous now of landing his fish.

What would have been the outcome of this dilemma can only be conjectured.

Fortune, however, favored Iron Hand.

A rope, dangling over the edge of the boat, on the port side, suddenly caught his eye.

"Strange that I didn't notice that before," he muttered.

However, the main thing was that it was there now, and the detective did not care to explain to himself that the excitement of the last few minutes might easily have prevented his noticing such a small thing as an inch rope, especially at night.

He pulled himself up on the rudder, which was still now that the ferry lay quietly in her slip, and caught at the rope.

He gave it a tug. It was taut!

"Good!" he muttered. "Now for the tug, in a double sense."

Twisting the slack of the rope around his left hand, he seized the collar of the Swell by the other and swung off.

Instinctively Gabe caught at the rope above the place where the detective held it, and pulled himself up, Iron Hand still holding him by the collar.

"Say!" growled Gabe.

"Well?"

"How can we ever get out of this while you hold me. Let go for a moment."

The force of this reasoning was obvious. Iron Hand would have preferred to hold his slippery

customer, but it would be impossible for either to get out of their present predicament, unless he gave his prisoner a little liberty.

So the detective released Gabe's collar, and Gabe climbed to the deck.

Hardly had he done so when the detective began to follow him, hand over hand, up the rope.

He was just putting out his hand to catch the edge of the boat, when—the rope gave way, and he fell back into the water.

At the same instant the grinning face of Gabe the Swell peered over the edge at the black water that had closed over the head of Iron Hand, and a keen knife was flourished triumphantly, as Gabe said, as if to himself:

"Not yet, Arthur Stanley, in spite of your Iron Hand!"

CHAPTER XIII.

HUNTING THEM DOWN.

THE detective's anger at being outwitted by the rascal he had actually had in his power boded deadly vengeance upon the Swell and his associates when the tables should be turned—as Iron Hand was certain they would be before long.

The detective was perfectly at home in the water, and even the fact that he was incumbered with his clothes did not prevent his considering that the best thing to do would be to swim away from the slip, and climb up the piles to the dock.

There was no chance of his getting to the deck of the ferry-boat from where he was, even if he had not suspected that Gabe Collins was waiting to deal him a deadly blow should his head appear above the level of the deck.

"It is not a very pleasant prospect—especially when everything was going along all right, and I nearly had the gang—but I must face it."

Thus soliloquized Iron Hand, as he turned his face outward and settled down for a swim that must necessarily be a long one. His intention was to swim around to the dock of the Inman Steamship Line, just below the ferry slips, and which he had noticed was empty at present. From this dock he could easily gain the mainland, and get around to the Pennsylvania Railroad Depot, although he had little hope of finding either his own party or those they were after, by that time.

He had not swum more than half a dozen strokes when an ominous sound made his blood turn colder than the chilly water had done already.

It was the clang of the pilot's bell.

The boat was about to start.

When it is remembered that the slips are made to fit the ferry-boats, and that there is so little room on either side that the edges of the decks bang against the piles as the boats pass in and out, and that the great paddle-wheels are tearing like monsters of ferocity all the time, no one will wonder that Iron Hand felt he was in a rather dangerous situation.

On came the boat, gathering speed as it advanced, and no one aboard noticed the detective.

"This is interesting!" he muttered, as he laid over on his side and swam with mighty strokes for dear life.

The bell was clanging, and the splashing of the paddle-wheels, beating the water into a foam, made a noise almost deafening to the man almost under the paddles.

"If I only knew which way the boat would be steered," he thought, "I might escape her yet."

For a moment he turned over on his back to collect his thoughts. He knew that to swim straight away from the great monster would be absurd. She could overhaul him in a dozen revolutions of her wheels.

"Ah! Of course!" he muttered.

He turned toward the lower side of the slip toward the open sea.

"What a fool I am," he went on. "The boats always steer up-stream, to allow for the tide taking them down. That is, when the tide is running out, as it is now."

His reasoning was correct. The nose of the boat was turned up-stream, and by swimming the other way—or even by lying still—he was quite safe.

Away went the boat, no one noticing the head bobbing about on the black waters, and then Iron Hand struck out steadily and powerfully for the steamship dock that he had had in his mind.

It was a very wet detective that climbed up the piles in the dock of the Inman Co. fifteen minutes afterward, but his water-soaked condi-

tion was nothing to be compared with his chagrin over the escape of the rascals he had thought were in his power.

"I'll have them yet, of course," he thought. "But I may not get my hands on them till they get to 'Frisco, with all the chances of losing them on the way."

He was not much troubled about his wet clothes. He was too well-known, when he chose to disclose his identity, to be inconvenienced by such a trifle as wet clothing.

He went into a little office in the warehouse of the Inman Co. alongside of the dock, where he found a night watchman sitting over a roaring fire, in spite of its being warm weather, and as ruddy, from lack of air and the heat of the fire together, as if he was a school-boy.

"Hello, Jim," he said, in a free-and-easy way, as he pushed open the door.

The watchman was on his feet in an instant, with a short but stout club in his hand.

"Hello yerself!" was his response, as he scanned the face and wet clothes of the intruder with a rather threatening glare from beneath his shaggy brow.

"Don't you know me, Jim?"

The detective held out his right hand as he spoke, and the watchman saw the glove.

"What, Mr.—"

"Never mind the name, Jim. It is enough that you know me. I want some dry clothes."

"Certainly, sir. Have you been in the water?"

"No, I have just come out of a bake-oven," laughed the detective good-humoredly.

"Well, well, well!" muttered the watchman, as he poked into a tall closet in a corner of his little office, so that his voice was strangely muffled.

He was a garrulous old fellow, and was almost bursting with curiosity to know what the detective had been passing through to arrive in such a condition. But he knew Iron Hand, and recognized the futility of trying to find out anything the detective desired to conceal.

"What have you there, Jim?" asked Iron Hand.

For answer, the old man pulled out a full suit of ordinary seaman's togs—blue cloth trousers, low shoes, woolen socks, a hickory shirt, a blue guernsey, a gaudy silk handkerchief, and a sou'-wester hat, so tarry and stiff that one could almost put to sea in it without anything else, if it were large enough. A sailor's knife, with lanyard fastened to it, came out with the clothes.

"They'll do," was the only observation of the detective, as he retired into a corner of the office, and changed his costume in an incredibly short space of time.

By rare good fortune, the clothes—shoes and all—fitted as if they had been made for him, and a very handsome, able-bodied seaman he appeared, as he put on the tarpaulin hat and transferred his belongings from his wet suit of clothes to the pockets of that he had on.

"Take care of these togs of mine, Jim, and if I do not return my sailor things, keep those in exchange. Will that do?" he asked.

"Lord love you, sir! Will that do? Won't anything do as you want? Don't I owe you anything I have that you may want, for what you have done for me and mine?"

"All right, Jim! Never mind about that! Good-night! Good-night, and good luck to you!"

He opened the door of the office and stepped out briskly, with the air of a man who had a great deal to do, and not so very much time to do it in.

The old watchman called after him: "Good luck to you, sir. Good luck!" Then as he went inside and shut the door of his baking little office, he continued softly to himself: "He is a square man if ever there was, and don't know what fear is. I wonder what he has been doing in the river. Maybe he heard of some crooks with a crib down under Hell Gate, and went after them. I guess that's it. He wouldn't hesitate a moment, not he, and he would pull them all in, if there was a hundred. That's what he'd do!"

The old man shook his head in admiration of the detective, and relapsed into speechlessness as if overcome by the immensity of the subject.

In the mean time Iron Hand was making the best of his way around to the Pennsylvania Railroad Depot.

He had little hope of making anything by the move, but at least he might find Barney Jerome and the old lady, Margaret Nuttridge.

There was nothing in the appearance of the sailor who strolled into the depot, with a nautical roll in keeping with his costume, to remind

one of Iron Hand, the detective, who had struggled with Gabe, the Swell, on the ferry-boat, and finally fallen overboard with him.

He walked into the restaurant of the depot, and cast a hasty glance around it, including a look into the ladies' room, where there was no one but two self-possessed young ladies, with small sachels suspended from their shoulders by straps, and whom he recognized as members of a farce-comedy company he had met in the far West a few weeks before.

There were two other men, who looked like "drummers," sitting on the high stools at the counter in the main restaurant, and that was all.

Into the big waiting-room he walked, with his sou'wester pulled well down over his brow, and his piercing eye searching every corner of the large apartment.

There was the usual crowd waiting for trains, and the usual impatience expressed on the faces of three-fourths of those thus waiting.

Not a sign of any of those he sought were to be seen in the throng.

At this moment a gateway leading to the platform was thrown open, and the announcement was made that the Philadelphia & Pittsburgh Express was ready.

Iron Hand walked to the gateway, and when the official there held out his hand for a ticket, just raised his tarry hat a little and looked in the other's face.

"All right, sir," said the gate-keeper, respectfully, and Iron Hand passed through.

The train for the West was standing in the station, and the colored porter of each sleeping-car stood by his steps, with his little stool ready, and assisted the passengers aboard.

Some of the passengers were already in their berths, for the sleepers had been standing there for an hour or two, although the regular day coaches had only just been backed into the station.

Iron Hand, with the mysterious influence he possessed, and which was recognized everywhere about this great depot, stepped aboard one of the sleepers and walked through.

All the berths except two were made up, and from behind the long, heavy curtains could be heard the regular breathing of passengers who were already trying to get part of their money's worth out of the Pullman Co.

In the one section that was not made up was a couple that attracted the attention of Iron Hand at once, and caused a faint smile to pass over his countenance, in spite of his anxiety.

It consisted of a young man in a slouch hat and with a Mexican-looking countenance, and an old lady in a large, old-fashioned bonnet and a neat black dress.

The old woman was leaning forward, whispering earnestly to the young man, and the large bonnet almost extinguished him, so that for the moment the detective could not be sure of the identity of either.

It was but for a moment, however.

Stepping up to them, Iron Hand whispered to the Mexican:

"Barney!"

"Be me sowl!" ejaculated the young man, in an eager whisper. "It's—"

The old woman clapped her hand over his mouth, and motioned to the detective to take a seat by her side.

"Well?" whispered Iron Hand.

"They are here," returned the old lady, pointing vaguely at the rows of curtained berths.

"Ah!"

"All of them," went on the old lady, nodding her head emphatically.

"Do they know you and Barney are here?"

"I do not think so. I saw them all sneak in, and Barney and I followed them. We determined not to let them out of our sight, and to trust to luck in catching them. Besides—"

"Well? Besides what?" put in the detective, as the old lady hesitated.

"Faith, I know what she's thinking. She means that she knew ye'd be to the fore in good time," said Barney.

"Barney is right," acquiesced Margaret. "I felt sure you'd get here somehow, though I didn't see you after you hit that rascally fellow you call Gabe."

"Well, never mind," said Iron Hand. "What about Lucy?"

"I have not seen her, but I feel it in my bones that she is here," returned the old lady, decidedly. "Moreover, now that you are here, I am determined to find out."

"Arthur, darlint," whispered Barney, to the detective, at this juncture.

"What is it?"

"It's yerself as makes the purty sailor, so

ye do. Begorra, Oi'm proud av yez in them clothes."

"You're a fool!" snapped the old lady.

Barney hung his head. He was evidently somewhat afraid of the outspoken old lady.

The old lady, having suppressed any tendency to levity on the part of Barney, proved without more ado that she meant to carry out her intention of finding her niece, if it was possible.

She walked along the car to a certain curtain, upon which hung a tag with a large "7," and deliberately pulled it aside.

It might have been a conjuring trick.

Hardly had she touched the curtain, when out from the lower berth bounced an old woman in a large, old-fashioned bonnet and a neat black dress, enough like Margaret Nuttridge to have been her twin sister.

CHAPTER XIV.

RETRIBUTION AT LAST.

FOR a moment the two women glared at each other, like tiger-cats preparing for a spring.

Then Margaret Nuttridge dashed Kit aside with one sweep of her still vigorous arm, and plunged headlong into the berth.

Kit was not to be disposed of in this way, however. She seized Miss Nuttridge and tried to pull her out.

There was a momentary trial of strength that looked doubtful. Then Kit prevailed, for she dragged the other old lady out and both sprawled in the aisle, the undignified proceeding being assisted by the sudden starting of the train.

The curtains were pulled down in the scuffle, and revealed—Lucy Kraft, with a handkerchief tied tightly over her mouth, and her hands and feet fastened so that she was helpless!

To draw the sailor's knife and cut the bonds was for Iron Hand the work of an instant. Then he assisted the girl to rise, and led her to the seat lately occupied by Margaret Nuttridge and Barney Jerome.

"Barney, take care of her," said the detective, briefly.

"Indade, Oi'll do that same, an' it's meself that is always proud to protect vartue an' beauty, so it is," responded the delighted Barney, who felt that this was a task just suited to his talents.

Iron Hand's movements were now characteristically cool and professional.

The two old ladies were clutching and clawing at each other in a most undignified fashion, and it was with some difficulty that the detective could tell which was which.

He did so at last, however, and with a quick snap, had the handcuffs on Kit about as soon as he had escorted Margaret to a seat by the side of Lucy Kraft.

The colored porter, who had been changing his blue coat for the white jacket to be worn on the journey, here appeared in the aisle, with a bewildered look in his black face.

He was still more bewildered when the detective, drawing a six-shooter from his hip pocket, dashed open the curtains of Section Number 8, and thrust his revolver into the lower berth, as he produced a pair of handcuffs and snapped them on some one inside the berth.

He did not stop here, either.

Calling the porter over to him, he whispered something in his ear, at the same time holding up a ten-dollar bill, so that the darky could see the "X" on it.

"For'de Lawd, mister, you bet I'll earn it, if I have to carve him like a hawg!" he exclaimed, as he pocketed the bill and drew a formidable razor.

He put one knee on the bed in the lower berth, and held the razor in a threatening manner, as if prepared to cut the occupant to pieces if necessary.

"Now for the others," muttered the detective, as, revolver still in hand, he climbed up the steps and peered into the upper berth.

Somebody seized him by the hair and tried to push him off the steps, but Iron Hand was on the alert, and making a headlong dive, he sprung into the berth bodily.

There was a great deal of bumping and noise in the berth, although the roar of the train hid some of it.

It did not last long, however. Before the general attention of those in the car had been attracted to the fracas, the detective let himself down from the berth and smiled in a satisfied way.

"Still holding him, are you?" he observed to the porter, who was flourishing his razor with professional ease.

"Yes, boss, 'deed I is. Boun' ter earn that

bill, suah, you know. How is it with them folks above there?"

"All right. I have them handcuffed together. They won't move till I take them out."

Here something else struck him. He looked around for Kit, but she was not to be seen.

"Where is that old beldame?" he muttered. "She cannot be far. I had her handcuffed."

At this moment the conductor, who had been making up his tickets in the smoking-room, came forward with the question:

"Do you people know anything of an old lady in black, with a big bonnet?"

"Yes. Wnat of her?" asked Iron Hand.

"She passed out of the car just now, on her way to the next, I suppose. But she looked rather wild, and if any of you people belong to her, you had better keep an eye on her, I think."

The detective did not answer.

He had a horrible suspicion, and he rushed out of the car to see whether it was mistaken or not.

One glance at the platform was enough. A shred of black cloth was clinging to the iron frame-work, and an old-fashioned black bonnet was streaming in the wind, having been caught by the strings in a crevice of the hand-rail.

"She has jumped off!" he exclaimed to himself.

Subsequent investigation proved the truth of the detective's supposition.

The mangled remains of the old woman, the handcuffs still upon her wrists, were found by the side of the tracks. Nearly \$3,000 in bills were found sewn into her dress. It was part of the booty stolen from the Express car at the top of the Alleghany Mountains.

Is it necessary to tell how Iron Hand, with his evidence well in hand, was able to railroad Jim Sturgis, Gabriel Collins and the man they called "Swikey" to the Penitentiary?

Or how Sturgis claimed Lucy Kraft for his sister, denying that she was any relation to Senator Kraft, the California millionaire, until the detective produced the *real* papers, taken from the back of the headboard of old Silas Nuttridge's bedstead, and proved that she was indeed Senator Kraft's daughter, kidnapped when a child by Jim Sturgis and the wretched old woman who was killed on the Pennsylvania Railroad by jumping or falling from the platform of a sleeping-car?

Or how the rascals tried a new tack and swore that Lucy, in male dress and under the name of "Wilkie," had taken part in robberies with them, actually being willing to be punished for those crimes provided they could drag this girl into the responsibility?

Or how Lucy's counsel convinced the jury that the girl had not been a free agent, but had been compelled, for her life, to obey Jim Sturgis in anything?

Suffice it that the rascals were put in the Penitentiary, and that Lucy Kraft was taken to California in the care of Iron Hand and her aunt, Margaret Nuttridge, and that she was received with open arms by her father and her young step-mother, who proved different from some step-mothers in that she took the young girl to her heart, and made her feel indeed that she now had a home and a mother's love.

Senator Kraft would not hear of Margaret Nuttridge going back to New York, but had a suite of rooms prepared for her in his own palatial mansion in the most aristocratic quarter of the City of the Golden Gate.

Silas prepared to live in his own quaint mansion in Gramercy Park, and he and his English flunkey, with whatever servants he may have concealed in the basement to cook and perform other household duties, go quietly along, without interfering with anybody. It is said, however, that old Silas is disposed to be more sociable than formerly, and Barney Jerome—who still has a room in his uncle's house when he is not on the road with a theatrical company—declares that his uncle has more than once said he would like to see his niece again, and that perhaps he will go to California some day to look at her, and offer his hand to his brother-in-law, Senator Kraft, whom he has not spoken to for over fifteen years.

The scene is a brilliantly-lighted reception-room in Senator Kraft's mansion in San Francisco. The apartment is crowded with the flower and chivalry of California, for it is the first opening of the house since the senator's return from Washington, after a long and arduous session of Congress.

The hum of conversation, mingled with the strains of an orchestra from the neighboring ball-room, fills the air, which is heavy with the perfume of rare exotics and costly scents carried

by the beautiful women for which the Golden Slope is famous.

There is a conservatory at one end of the apartment, in which the deep green of palms, casting an umbrageous shade over the fountain that plays in the middle of a golden-fish pond, are apparently bearing fruit of vari-colored incandescent lights. The conservatory appears to be crowded with plants and roses, but this is only due to the skill of the man who laid it out. There are settees here and there, arranged for the most delightful *tete-a-tetes*, and not one couple could be seen by another.

On one of these settees are a girl and a well-built, rather grave-faced young man. The girl wears a dress of some filmy material, while around her neck flashes a string of blue-white diamonds. She is very beautiful. The young man is tall and powerful-looking, and has closely-curling black hair and piercing dark eyes.

The two are Lucy Kraft and Iron Hand. "And so you are really Arthur Stanley, the son of Colonel Stanley, whose feats in the war have made him famous all over the world?" the girl is saying.

"Yes, Colonel Stanley was my father, and I only wish his son was fully worthy of him."

"In what?"

"In spirit, in courage and in the performance of feats that might be expected of the son of such a father."

The young girl blushed slightly, as she said: "What feats could be asked of you more than I knew you to perform less than a year ago?"

The detective sighed.

"Ah! If I might only hope that—that—"

He broke off, while the girl began nervously plucking at a Jacqueminot rose on her corsage.

"Hope what—what?" urged Lucy, gently, but with such expectancy illuminating her pure face.

"That my feats, as you term them, might make you think favorably of my aspirations to win your love. You have known my feelings for a long time, Lucy; but I have never dared to say what is in my heart, till now."

Lucy Kraft's answer need not be recorded.

"And now you have my promise," says Lucy, after a long silence, "I want you to tell me one thing."

"What is it?"

"Why does no one ever see your right hand ungloved?"

The detective bites his lip.

"Lucy, I will tell you when we—we—are married."

The girl hangs her head.

"Won't that do?" he asks.

"If you so prefer," is the submissive answer.

Arthur Stanley is not blind. He sees that the girl is disappointed—perhaps distressed; that touches his pride and honor.

He snatches off the white glove from his right hand, and holds it out so that she can see the back of it.

There is a deep scar across it from one side to the other!

"Oh, Arthur, dear, what is that?"

"I'll tell you," puts in another voice, as a tall, keen-looking man steps in front of the couple.

"Papa!" says Lucy, with a start and a blush.

"Yes, papa," returns Senator Kraft. "You want to know how Arthur Stanley got that gash on his hand. Well, it was from the tomahawk of a Sioux, in Dakota, and if the tomahawk had not struck there, it would have brained your father. That is all. Arthur took the Indian in his two hands, afterward, and squeezed him to death! The Indians thought he had a charmed life, and he has been called the 'Charmed Detective' ever since."

"Papa!"

"Yes. That was where he obtained his sobriquet of Iron Hand, and—a life-long friend in Senator Kraft. And, let me add: I heard part of your conversation just now, and I shall be proud to have for a son-in-law such a man as IRON HAND THE CHARMED DETECTIVE. God bless him!"

THE END.

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